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SURPRISING THE FAMILY

AND OTHER PERADVENTURES

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By

FRANCES LESTER WARNER

Author of 'Endicott and I,' 'Groups and Couples' 'Life's Minor Collisions' (with Gertrude Warner), etc.

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TO MY FATHER-IN-LAW

GEORGE MILBANK HERSEY

AND TO HIS BROTHER

HENRY JOHNSON HERSEY

IN THE HOPE THAT THEY

WILL, PERADVENTURE, BE SURPRISED

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SURPRISING THE FAMILY

(By Way of Prelude)

IN the fine old days when fire-horses still ran to fires, a little boy was quietly playing on his nursery floor. Suddenly, outside, there arose a great clangor of bells and shouting of men, and past the front of the house dashed a fire-engine, at the same moment when a runaway horse went tearing along the other road in the rear.

The little boy, beside himself with the thrill of these rival disasters, sped to and fro, from front window to back window, in an anguish of difficult choice. Normally, if you are a small boy, you watch a fire-engine going to a fire. But this runaway horse was no ordinary runaway, for he was attached to a bakery wagon, and, as he galloped, every little door and drawer and pigeonhole in the wagon sprang ajar, while the baker himself clung to the careening side-entrance, in immediate danger of smash.

After fire-engine and runaway had both clattered out of sight, the little boy climbed up into his mother's lap, and exclaimed, with regret, 'Oh, Mother! All the good things happen at once!'

That remark has been cherished by two generations as a text for those occasions in a household when extraordinary events come on in clusters, in bevies of six or seven. Affairs have that trick of concentrating themselves in batches. Every thoughtful civilization has an adage for it. Especially in a lively household, it is a safe gamble that if one unexpected event has chosen a given moment to occur, several others have hit on the same time.

That is why the visitor who dotes on 'surprising the family' does so at his risk. Something else is likely to be surprising them too, as happened one day when a benevolent father, returning from a lecture-tour, brought home with him a British tenor called 'The Yorkshire Nightingale,' to sing to the children. The father and his guest arrived at the very moment when the family physician was pronounc-

ing the youngest child down with the mumps, when the lineman had just come to repair the telephone wire, and when the cat, head well up, tail swinging aloft, was just bringing a large mouse in at the door. Nightingale, doctor, lineman, cat, mouse, and mumps — it was like the group that met the man who was going to St. Ives.

Never before had that father arrived home to be greeted by any such scenic array. But then, he had never before fetched home a Yorkshire Nightingale. That is exactly the point. If you plan to confer a pretty surprise upon a family, you thereby automatically give the signal for a local convention of motley Fates. The very young and the very optimistic will never believe in this final perversity of affairs. But if you live long enough with your bright eye open, you perceive it to be so.

Upon this subject, families are divided into widely differing camps. There are those who sincerely love surprises, even awkward ones, very well. There are those

who eternally hate them beyond words. But probably the largest number, grown cautious through experience, would answer, 'That depends.'

In this last group now falls a charming household that used to welcome astonishments of every kind. Their attitude was modified, last summer, when one of their far-away nieces was coming to visit them at the beach, and had promised to arrive on a certain early evening train. The small grandson of the family had been told that he might stay up to greet her, and that he might bring her suitcase up from the station in his little cart. But the guest discovered that she could connect with a train that arrived several hours earlier; and, knowing how the family specialized in surprise-parties, she caught the afternoon express, took a taxi as far as the entrance to the driveway, and went stealing up the lovely path among the locust-trees and rosebushes, unobserved. Around to the side porch she flitted like a shadow. And there, stretched prone on the grass side by side, lay her

small cousin and his grandfather, both in overalls, their heads thrust under the little express-wagon, on whose axle they were finishing some repairs.

Up to this unsuspecting group pranced the visitor, wreathed in smiles. With a startled jerk, the two reared up their heads and stared at her with saucer eyes; and the little expressman burst into a torrent of weeping at the sight.

'Oh, Muvver! Oh, Grandmuvver!' he sobbed, as he rushed to the door. 'She's come! She's here already! Oh, I can't go to meet her wiv my cart! Oh, she's come! She's *come!*'

It was like the rhythm of some ancient Biblical lamentation. The ladies of the house were also surprised, it seemed, in the very act of removing two lobsters from their shells.

'Oh,' mourned the ladies, 'the salad was going to be all ready, and we were going to be in our white dresses, on the porch!'

In the midst of these outcries, the grandfather observed, 'If we keep on apologizing, she'll think we aren't glad

she's come!' and thereupon the whole group joined hands and danced around the visitor to express their joy. But it was to be greeted by the wailing and the keening of the family that the guest arrived.

In these days of the automobile touring party, nobody is safe. Thoughtful motorists would naturally telephone ahead before landing; but with the best of intentions they can never predict their plans with certainty, and so they hesitate to plunge their friends into elaborate preparations, or to pledge themselves for any appointed hour. Thus, if you live in a vacation country, you never know what far-flung traveler may at any moment come driving in.

Even if the time of arrival is announced, you cannot be too sure. A breezy party of tourists exploring the Adirondacks did once take the trouble to write to their long-lost relatives, saying that they would spend Sunday far up in the mountains, and would be going down to pay a few calls in the old home region some time the

first of the week. The note arrived on Monday morning, to find the family swiftly getting ready for a patriotic picnic, to be held by delegates from all over the country at an historic site — Israel Putnam's Wolf Den — on an anniversary day. The road to the Wolf Den was none too easy for visitors to find, and the sign-painter of the family had agreed to paint and letter twenty wooden road-signs, large and clear. This she was doing, and sign-boards were drying all over the house. There was going to be plenty of white paint left over; and therefore the mother of the family had seized on this occasion to touch up a number of odds and ends around the house, among them the living-room doors. Already the doors were off their hinges, and the ladies were clad in their paint-costumes for the fray. Also, since the patriotic pilgrims were to be feasted at the Den, the other daughter was busy mixing cake.

The ladies put their heads together over the note. By every calculation, it was impossible for the tourists to arrive

before afternoon. Tuesday was more probable, but two o'clock on Monday was the earliest they could make at sixty miles an hour. The painting would be finished by that time, and the cooking out of the way. But as to the doors, that part of the painting had better be postponed, and the doors put back on their hinges before noon.

At eleven the work was nearly done. The maid could be spared to run the vacuum sweeper around the front of the house; and the mother and one daughter, still in paint-costumes, convened to hang the doors.

An adequate paint-costume is not a reception frock. Properly, it is a garment too old ever to be put on again; not, so to say, *chic*. While the doors were being replaced, the youngest daughter thought this would be a convenient moment to touch up the family's white picnic-shoes. She collected eight good pairs of best and second-best canvas pumps, and set to work busily on the back porch with whiting and brush.

At this picturesque moment, a huge limousine tooled stealthily up the rear driveway, and found her sitting in the midst of the cluster of white shoes, surrounded, like the Rose of the Compass on a mariner's map, by their sixteen points.

There was nothing to do but to show the merry tourists in, through the house. Large road-signs lettered 'WOLF DEN' marked the way. The visitors arrived in the living-room just in time to assist the last door onto its hinges. The maid coiled the hose of the vacuum cleaner deftly over her arm, and vanished, like a professional snake-charmer, through the door.

'We came down from the mountains Sunday afternoon,' explained one of the jovial gentlemen in the group. 'We *hoped* you'd be surprised.'

'Oh! Yes!' piped the paint-costumes in treble chorus. 'We are!' and the tourists died of joy.

All this is a great lark for the surprisers; but the victims, even though possessed of a copious sense of humor, cannot help remembering how graciously they could, an

hour later, have been ready to 'receive.' It is like having the stage-curtain at amateur theatricals roll up accidentally too soon. The audience is in raptures to behold the unstudied postures of the actors and scene-shifters on the stage. But the performers feel that they were not discovered at their best. It is hard for them to regain their high dramatic mood. They know how Samantha felt when she 'refused' to be surprised.

'But,' reason the tourists who like to swoop down and astonish their friends, 'it makes it all the nicer. We'd far *rather* find people just as they *are!*'

So they would, so they would. And, of course, with immediate relatives, and with very trusty friends, no moment is too intense. But when you have not seen your acquaintances for years, and may not meet them again for several more, you do like to present a pretty scene of reasonable domestic felicity to the eye. You prefer to have your flying visitors carry away a memory that at least represents your average, if not your best.

And the average, nowadays, is supposed to be pretty well kept up. A little boy expressed the modern ideal one day. Said he, at luncheon, to a guest, 'I'm going to be a minister. Shall I preach you a sermon?'

'Yes! Go ahead!' said the attentive visitor, who had known the little bandit in his less ministerial moods.

'All right!' said the seven-year-old, drawing down his chin and sitting very upright, like a miniature apostle proclaiming an early twentieth-century creed: 'I want everybody in the world to be good, and happy, and *swell!*'

'Oh, darling!' remonstrated his exquisite mother, 'you can't be all three at once!'

But the ambitious modern spirit likes to think you can. This triad of virtues, especially the last one, holds the field. Beleaguered as we are on all sides by insidious advertising, which assures us that we are 'judged' by our accessories in house and garb, we are supposed to be striving toward the mark. That is why we

are really sorry to be found in our honest paint-costume. We know that it should at least have been an artist's smock. Even if we have never accepted the third and most exacting of the modern trio of graces for our object in life, we still hate to have our friends find us appearing even less dazzling than we ordinarily are.

Of course, we can explain to our surprisers that such a concatenation of events never happened before and never will happen again. They will believe us when we say that we are not chronically painting road-signs. But in their hearts, they feel that they have found us unaffectedly ourselves, just as we naturally are in our workaday moods. They feel that we were in a far more typical state than we would have been if they had found us ready for company, perfectly preened, chirruping a welcome to them on the vineclad porch.

But the state we are found in when surprised may not be natural or characteristic in the least. No reliable conclusions can be drawn from it at all. It may be

like what happened once to a friend of mine in the third grade in school. She was the best reader in our class, and the most law-abiding, and the best beloved, a gentle little maiden without a single fault. After she had read her paragraph one day, the boy across the aisle smuggled into her hand one of those old-fashioned velvet molasses kisses, done up in canary-colored waxed paper, fresh and crisp. To the astonishment of all of us, Eleanor was tempted. Knowing that she would not be called on to read again, she slid the toothsome delicacy into her mouth; whereupon three members of the School Committee filed into the room to visit school. Our pretty teacher turned to her star pupil, and said sweetly, 'Eleanor, you may read.'

Eleanor, incapacitated, shook her head.

The teacher, knowing Eleanor's retiring disposition, urged her, first gently, then firmly.

At last, Eleanor managed to gasp, 'I can't!'

'Oh, yes, you can, Eleanor!' protested the teacher. The affair was rapidly be-

coming a test of discipline. We all adored this teacher, and her lightest word was law. Yet here was her brightest and most particular, refusing to perform.

We all knew what had disabled our champion, and we were in the last stages of apoplexy, when, pressed beyond endurance, Eleanor daintily removed her impediment, and rose to read. The gentlemen of the School Committee smiled, and the schoolroom rocked with glee. But Eleanor and the teacher did not smile. This set us off again. The members of the Board composed themselves and waited for us to calm down; but we could not calm down. We were demoralized, given up to godless mirth, and at last they actually had to leave us; whereupon an awe-stricken silence fell.

Now then: if you are a school visitor, you are wise enough to perceive that this situation must be out of the usual run. But you have no way to tell just how unusual it is. You are likely to think that if a teacher and her students were in perfectly ideal relations, such an utter lapse

of control could not occur. Yet, in actual fact, that whole episode was completely out of character, unheard-of, like a nightmare, for Eleanor, and for the teacher of that school. Never at any other time had our teacher needed to 'speak twice.' Never had the leader of our reading class involved herself with a bonbon in school hours. And, of course, the Board of Education must needs assemble to make us their one visit, punctually, on the dot.

Events do hold conventions. And the subject of all their programmes is how to turn the human spirit upside down. That is the reason why you cannot pounce suddenly upon a situation or a household or a mind, and hope to size it up.

There is a certain hospitable family that has coined an adjective to describe these exciting collisions of events; they call them 'predicamentary.' To look at this family from the outside, you would think they were always tranquil, always at leisure to stray about in their cool garden among the tall larkspur flowers and lilac-trees. But the various branches of that

family, knowing the busy tribal ways, always telephone ahead before they visit, and inquire, 'Are you doing anything predicamentary?' They like to know beforehand whether the coast is clear.

Possibly this caution is excessive. But the excellent team-work of the Fates should be generously allowed for by all hovering tourists, all school superintendents, all writers who scan the human scene for 'local color,' all welfare workers who analyze the 'decay' of the modern home, and by all psychologists who hope to chart the realities of the human soul by means of a questionnaire. If we are sophisticated, or if we have warning of your purposes beforehand, we may tell you large lies, or act them for you, without meaning to, in our effort to oblige. On the other hand, if you plan to spring out of ambush at us, you give the cosmic signal for outlandish accidents to befall us; and thus again you may fail to catch us as we really are. The mortal spirit, in its most genuine guises, is not always found 'at home.'

SURPRISING THE FAMILY

An old Southern darkey, whom the whole countryside called 'Uncle Jason,' summed the matter up one day, when the lady for whom he was working had been entertaining unexpected guests, and, a bit distracted, had come out to telephone. 'Oh, I must be crazy!' she murmured to herself as she searched the directory twice through

'No, Mistus,' said Uncle Jason comfortingly, 'you is not crazy. You is jes' like ole Jason. Your mind comes and goes.'

A mind has a way of doing that, and so does household calm. It comes, and goes. You simply cannot hope to catch it off its guard very often, in its completeness, and learn its type. Too many things are likely to be happening to it all at once. For the most conventional members of the human family may be found doing something wild and whirling, something predicamentary, something that authorities on feeble-mindedness tactfully call 'a-typical' — if you take them by surprise.

MEDITATIONS OF A DAUGHTER–IN–LAW

I HAD the curious good fortune of first seeing my mother-in-law without knowing who she was. This happened, of course, some time before I had been invited to marry her son. I caught sight of her at a lecture, of all places in the world, and as the programme went on I found myself stealing refreshing glances at her bright and quizzical face. After the lecture we drifted toward each other, as congenial spirits may, in the confused Virginia reel of greetings and remarks. For purposes of scrutiny she had immensely the advantage over me, because she did know who I was, and was looking upon me, doubtless, with mixed feelings of her own. But I was well enslaved and enchanted before she announced her name to me.

I wish that every daughter-in-law might have a preliminary moment of this kind, meeting her future mother-in-law

as a private individual, unbeknownst, with no suspicion that she herself was being scrutinized. For I suppose that I shall never get over the feeling that she and I are independent friends, luckily given a chance to meet more often because her son and my husband happen to coincide.

If she were not in the world, I should be deprived of three distinct benefits that only a mother-in-law has power to confer. The first has in it an element of the pictorial, the second of the practical, the third of reverie and dream.

These three benefits, I think, are not consciously bestowed: certainly not the first, the picturesque presentation to me of the most gracious points of the family tradition. The experienced mother of a family holds the key to all the most charming customs, the most cherished rituals, the dramatic setting of her children's early home, each detail fragmentary in itself but significant as a clue.

For instance: it still takes my conservative breath away to observe that

family's inspired capacity for transfiguring real estate into something far more beautiful than it was. All the members of the tribe think in the architect spirit. Blueprints run in their blood. To me, before my marriage, a house had seemed a fairly substantial phenomenon, not lightly to be pulled about. Now I have seen what can be done with a flash of imagination and an astonished carpenter managed with a firm hand. I have seen an idea strike my mother-in-law at the dinner-table, at a time of family reunion at their summer home. I have seen her sons kindling instantly with hot-headed objections to her scheme — all pencils whipped out of their scabbards and brandished with reckless points, plans sketched rapidly on the backs of envelopes, slashing criticisms exchanged across the table, lines modified, lines crossed out — and the lady of the house finally collecting all plans, all criticisms, with a creative flash, and evolving a fire-new idea from the heat of argument: an idea better than her first, different from her

sons', bullet-proof, delightful, practical, instantly recognized by her roaring rivals as a flawless thing.

I have seen her turn a forlorn deserted carriage-house into a charming little cabin-studio. I have seen her make a blank staring window look romantic with a trellis, and a cramped entry look spacious by removing a meaningless bit of wall. 'It seems to me,' she told me once, 'that I have spent my life in taking down partitions.' She was thinking of lath and plaster when she spoke, but it is true also of the less palpable staging of spiritual life. Without my stirring mental picture of her in the act of pouncing on crude materials, knocking them deftly about, clearing them of trash, and making them take on order and design, I could never have dreamed how implicitly I may trust in the similar inspirations of her son. My own cautious residential type of mind needs some such vivid reassurance before it can feel easy in the presence of the authentic builder — and judicious wrecker — type.

It is a great asset to know, through direct observation of one's mother-in-law, that certain traits which one's own family might have deemed out of the ordinary have always been considered the usual thing, safely domesticated, in one's husband's early home. A father-in-law might give one the same general information, but it comes more reassuringly from his wife.

The mental picture just described, of course, visualizes an important central trait. But I shall always treasure equally another sort of picture that my mother-in-law has given me, focused on a smaller scale. One afternoon early in our acquaintance she invited me to take tea with her, all by myself. But as it happened, one of her adoring little grandsons had been left with her unexpectedly by his mother, who had dropped him there, like superfluous baggage in a checking-room, on her way to town. The little boy, with all the rapture that a three-year-old heart can hold, was encamped in the lee of the daffodils in the sunny bay-window,

playing a game that had been invented once upon a time by his grandmother for a certain little eldest son of her own — a game especially adapted for eldest sons, because it can best be played solitaire. All the little boys of the family had played it, however, in their day; and this tiny grandson was sensitive enough to be doubly happy in playing with his uncles' old-time toys. They were only a collection of small tin things that would 'pour': a miniature coffee-pot, a tea-kettle, a tin dipper with a nose, a toy watering-can, and a fluted bowl, most perilous of all. To play the game, you were allowed to have exactly enough cold water to fill the smallest of these. From this, the dipper, you poured into the next container, and from that to the next, varying your fractions of volume and your sequence at will, and never spilling overboard a single drop. The glory and pride of the game centered upon the budding masculine joy in an accurate eye and a steady hand, the unflagging thrill of highly specialized negotiations with a tricky fluid largely

forbidden as a plaything in one's career.

It called for an imagination somewhat expert in spiritual values to invent and perpetuate that heavenly game for baby boys. In the midst of his play the little grandson turned to ask a question of his grandmother, and called her 'Mother' by mistake. Whereupon, remembering the conventions, he politely changed it to 'Drandma,' and they both laughed. His grandmother stepped over to the window to answer a question about a twist in the tea-kettle's spout. And now, if I choose to shut my eyes, I can see them still with their bright heads together, gravely examining the tiny venerable bit of tinware in the sun. A rapid turn with an accomplished hand, and the trouble was rectified; the thing poured straight as a die. Mutual congratulations followed — the entirely sympathetic triumph over material imperfections felt by two resourceful and exacting hearts. The scene was typical of hundreds that I watched later. Beginning at the beginning, she thor-

oughly knew the breed she had to handle, and all their springs of joy.

Such pictures as these that I remember are not only pretty; they are the bright window through which I understand the exquisite and ineradicable beauty of my husband's early home-life, the essential position that it will always hold in the sequences of his thought.

One day, later, when we were visiting the family, we rummaged out a heap of old advertising matter among my husband's treasure-boxes in the attic, and he told me with what fortitude his mother had borne her lot when he and his brother were struck with a craze for machinery, and sent for catalogs of every kind purely for the pleasure of gazing upon the pictures of great machines. Their tastes were ambitious, and they gathered catalogs illustrating newest models of every mammoth sort. In consequence, in the daytime when the boys were in school, agents from all these companies would come to the house, a ten-mile trip into the suburbs, supposing they were on the trail of a 'pro-

spect,' and thinking to place important orders for steam-turbines, oil-well machinery, traveling-cranes, magnetic chucks and radial drills, steam and electric capstans and windlasses, drop hammers and power-shears, foghorns with electric and gasoline-engine drive, automatic stokers, Otis elevators, Bessemer converters, and reaping machines. Their hostess received them all with charming apologies and light refreshments, and sent them away entirely mollified.

A comprehending mother of this stamp does not bring up a family for nothing. After years of perspicacious manœuvres she is in a position to give a newcomer into the circle many practical points. With entire unselfishness she has given me all I asked, including her choicest and most secret copyrighted rules for celebrated dishes invented by herself. Thanks to her, I am able to serve, of a Sunday night, a traditional supper-dish whose sheer aroma stirs memories of informal suppers with guests around the fireplace long ago, of far-away faces and eager talk, and a

certain active figure flitting incorrigibly about, not easily to be reduced to order — her sons, feeling their conversation wasted when she was on the wing, adjuring her at intervals to 'come and sit *down!*' To invoke the most lively memories of those days, I have only to turn to certain extra pages pasted into my cookery book, where in her handwriting I find the detailed rules that she wrote down for me one evening by lamplight at the beach.

The practical advantage of possessing a mother-in-law includes not only advice received and valued 'points,' but also the sense that in a dilemma there is always a court of grand appeal. For this purpose my mother-in-law has served her children well, a fact that is true of my own mother no less. In combination, these two can at any moment form an incomparable team. When my husband and I became engaged, his mother and my mother, living in widely separated towns, had never met. One day, in my own garden at home, he and I were discussing plans for the wedding, and struck a point on which we were

in doubt. 'Call up your mother on the telephone,' said I with sudden inspiration, 'and let your mother and my mother work it out together.' Accordingly he corralled my mother, planted her at the telephone, put in a long-distance call, and finally got the connection, with the two capable mothers, both laughing, on one wire. He introduced them elegantly, and then sat with me in attentive ecstasy on the staircase, while Greek, over the long-distance telephone, met Greek.

Perhaps one need hardly state that there remained, after that brisk conference, no shadow of doubt about our plans.

This practical department of a mother-in-law's proper function is, I suppose, the traditional field for clash. Practical advice firmly administered implies sometimes a deficiency in the mental equipment of the advisee. Carried to a critical extreme, it puts the daughter-in-law chronically on the defensive, for she feels that every detail of her life's plan is being scrutinized. Of all beings on earth, the

mother of married children has a right to scrutinize the world with the most apprehensive and responsible eye. The responsible eye is unwinking, very bright and clear. Its glance calls for an answer. The eye of Queen Marie of Rumania, mother-in-law of the Balkans, is responsible. The eyes of Buddha are not.

With the glance of our mother-in-law, however loving, upon us, we are anxious to toe the mark. We should hate to have her consider us a drag upon her son. Therefore the most tentative shaft of her criticism strikes home.

The classic mother-in-law remark in my own family was made by my father's mother on one of her delightful visits to our home. Two of us children and the maid had recently recovered from what corresponded to influenza in those days. Everything had returned fairly to the normal, but certain of the usual household duties had been overlooked in the rush. We were all sitting around the fireplace after tea when my grandmother, then quite an old lady, turned inquiringly to

her daughter-in-law at the opposite side of the hearth. 'Elizabeth, dear,' said she to my mother, 'don't you *like* to have your andirons bright?'

After the shout that went up from the circle, our grandmother joined in the laughter at her own question with comforting chuckles, and assured my mother that she had been entirely innocent in her search for information. She had thought that the dull finish might be the latest style, and that the younger generation perhaps preferred its brasses with a touch of tasteful tarnish here and there. One never could tell unless one asked. But her question proved to be a paradigm remark. Ever since, the accepted formula for courteous criticism in our clan has been the half-anxious, half-indulgent query, 'Don't you *like* to have your andirons bright?'

It is not only keen-eyed criticism that has power to strike panic to a daughter-in-law's inmost heart. Nearly every good home-maker who has successfully managed her family has acquired an immense

knack for what my own mother calls 'slave-driving.' We all used to take a morose sort of pleasure in calling her Simon Legree when we found her in this mood. 'Now,' my mother used to observe upon occasion, 'I am going to slave-drive a little.' Whereupon we knew that some member of the family was about to be goaded on to vaster achievements and ampler fates.

A mother, with all the humorous backing of long acquaintance with her children, can slave-drive far more safely than a mother-in-law. Yet it would be a calamity if our mothers-in-law could never give us suggestions, never spur us on.

It all depends on the vocabulary and the context and the mood. From my own experience I know that the thing can, with immense good profit, be neatly done.

For illustration: I had an ambitious project in mind not long ago that I knew would interest my mother-in-law. Said I to my husband, 'Shall I write and tell her?'

'Well,' said he, 'you must remember

that any idea as interesting as this will act on her mind like touching off the fuse on one of those fireworks that we used to call a "flowerpot." You've seen them, with all sorts of things flowering out, Roman candles and pinwheels and stars and chrysanthemums, ending with the face of Theodore Roosevelt and the American flag. If you don't mind *variations* on your plan, go ahead.'

I did not mind variations. I went ahead. And by the earliest possible return post my plan was doubled in value, alight with unexpected inspirations, brightened almost beyond belief. Yet it was my own workable plan still, only ever so much the better for being also hers and mine. With her knowledge of the available resources she was able to show me possibilities that advanced my project far beyond its original scope.

This sort of practical interchange would in itself be quite enough to keep our relationship unspoiled and sweet. But there is another realm of her influence that is more difficult to describe, one that pene-

trates to the rarely entered contemplative areas of my own mind. It involves her entire life and letters, and all her casual deeds. It is not enough to say that her achievements have shown me what can be done in the harmonious home-life of that particular family-line. That is part of it, but my contemplation is also fascinated by the entire tone and tenor of her busy days. And this is where, in the matter of benefits, the father-in-law comes in. Together he and she provide a precedent; they are a sort of College of Heralds to interpret the family mood and trend. They have blended for us, in a workable combination, all the various traits and tendencies of their separate ancestral strains.

And now, when I meditate upon them, I see them in a hundred flashing, companionable moods; planting a tree together, hatching business projects with a pile of papers between them, training up a rambler-rose vine, training up also, in belated details, their grown sons. I remember especially the ancestral home-

stead that they took me to visit, on the edge of the New England coast, where one of the great-great-grandfathers had lived in Colony days. I shall not forget the lovely moment when we all stood together at the quiet doorway of the house and watched the white sea-gulls flying over the dunes. A spear of beach grass by the pathway was describing perfect circles around itself in the wind, with the point of its blade in the sand. We let ourselves in with a big key, through the old doorway under the wide fanlight. The low white-paneled rooms were empty for the moment, but they had been left spruce and neat, with a freshly laid heap of pine-cones and driftwood in the fireplace, traditionally put there always for the use of the casual summer visitors among the scattered clan. As a very special honor, my mother-in-law told me that I might be the one to light the driftwood fire. And as we sat and watched it, it burned with all its long-stored colors of strange violet and wavering green and electric blue. The moment seemed almost like an initiation

ceremony to me. The hearth where we were sitting belonged to us all: to my father-in-law and to his son by right of lineage; to my mother-in-law and to me by right of imagination, and by election into the family line.

It is a good deal of a venture, this business of accepting an unrelated personality into the vivacious family group, with all the intimate privileges of full membership in the line. Mothers and fathers of grown sons and daughters perform, I think, their very most gracious act of generous love when they ratify these nominations, and make for the sensitive newcomer such a warm and beautiful hearthside place in the spiritual continuity of the home.

MEDITATIONS OF A MOTHER-IN-LAW

(Recorded from my Mother's Experience and from Her Point of View)

THERE was once a rumor that the florists of this country, well pleased with their success in establishing the carnation as the emblem for Mother's Day, were planning to appoint a day for mothers-in-law. The florists, it was said, were open to suggestions as to an appropriate flower.

A group of ladies, most of us mothers-in-law ourselves, were discussing this false alarm at an afternoon tea.

'Well,' asked some one, 'what would be an appropriate flower?'

'Oh!' exclaimed the only young newly married lady among us, with a sudden burst of inspiration — 'The snapdragon.'

Then, remembering who and what we were, she withdrew that nomination hastily, assuring us that such a flower would never apply to us or to her own mother-

in-law. Jack's mother was a darling and had just given her a fur coat. She had had in mind only the abstract traditional mother-in-law, whom we did not resemble in any way.

This was comforting to hear. But I think that nearly every mother of married children is haunted now and then by the traditional mother-in-law specter. Does she, unknown to herself, resemble that goblin? Every one knows that the mother-in-law has been much maligned, but a caricature so popular and persistent must touch the truth somewhere. One would prefer not to be playing that hackneyed character-part.

Under the sway of that fear, when my eldest daughter was married, I took the bridegroom aside for a moment after the ceremony and said to him earnestly, 'I shall try to be a good mother-in-law to you.' I said it in the full seriousness of a vow, affixing my promise as a sort of rider to my daughter's marriage contract. I have been ambitious that my children-in-law should think of me as one who never

tries to manage or to meddle; one whose advice is to be had only when applied for; one who, in an emergency, is always ready and able to step promptly into the breach. The perfect mother-in-law, I have come to believe, is a combination of hostess, news correspondent, consulting-bureau, packer and shipper, valued friend, and first-aid kit.

To be considered expert in those lines has been my aim. But in my efforts to work up this reputation, I have discovered in my own spirit certain tendencies that are, I think, the eternal roots of the old tradition about the meddlesome mother-in-law. The profound philosopher who could probe those roots would come upon an underground meshwork more intricate than the roots of any banyan grove. For the roots of our far-famed 'meddlesomeness' are the very roots from which grew our most essential crop of motherly virtues when our children were small: the virtues of faithfulness to endless trivial detail, attention to a host of exacting small duties, persistence in our ideals,

foresight in warding off danger, and foresight in making dreams come true.

The central root of all these virtues was our peculiarly apprehensive maternal sense of responsibility. Skillful mothers are so anxious that everything shall be all right! Even after our children are safely married, we are still responsible. It is not that we distrust our children-in-law. Our watchfulness is not a new trait inspired by them. It is a hang-over from long experience, and it takes them in only because we now look at them and at our own children in the same glance. We know our own children a little too well to be perfectly easy in our minds. A mother rarely feels that she has had quite time to put the finishing touches on her products; yet whatever modifications she tries to make now in her own children must involve the interests of their partners. Therefore, if she wants to avoid the appearance of trying to superintend the new couple, she does well to get in her chief master-strokes before the wedding day.

With this in mind, when my own son

Geoffrey became engaged to be married, I had a long talk with him about his faults. I told him that his lovely little fiancée was very different from me and from his sisters. 'Geoffrey,' said I, 'if you ever roared at her in an argument the way you roar at us, her heart would be completely broken. She'd never get over it.'

'Mother,' suggested Geoffrey suddenly, 'I wish you'd ask Priscilla down here some time when I am away, and tell her all about me. I'd like to have her warned beforehand. Tell her all my faults.'

I laughed, but Geoffrey persisted, and soon arranged a definite appointment. Therefore, one snowy December afternoon when I was alone in the house, Priscilla came to call. Together she and I sat down before the fire, with our feet on the same footstool, and for two hours, while a white New England blizzard whirled through the rosebushes outside the window, I recounted Geoffrey's faults. I covered the ground quite thoroughly, because I wanted Priscilla to have the reassurance,

in case he ever displayed his ferocious moods to her, of knowing that he had often done even so to us, and yet could love us still. I suppose I also wanted her to know that his faults were not habits that I had cultivated in him or endorsed.

But as I look back upon it now, I think that I might have saved my breath. For Geoffrey as a householder is transformed, and I sometimes wonder if Priscilla thinks that I failed to appreciate my own son. She has never seen him in the rôle of bold bad man, so ably advertised by me. When I first saw his angelic manners under her régime I held my breath, because in the old days Geoffrey in a beatific frame of mind meant Geoffrey getting ready to break out in a new place. But as time goes on and the serenity remains unbroken, I repeat to myself that perfect line from the 'Just So Stories' — 'Not always was the Kangaroo as now we do behold him' — a text that I recommend to all mothers who have seen their brisk sons neatly trained by well-selected wives.

Indeed, the longer I live the more

ready I am to believe that a young man's wife may be better acquainted with his actual current present-day self than his mother can possibly be. My daughter-in-law sees in her husband a man of affairs on whose judgment she implicitly relies. I respect his judgment too, in a way, but I cannot help knowing that he is the same Geoffrey who, at the age of four, howled himself into a high fever one day because I would not let him lead a bloodhound in the parade when 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' came to town. Mothers view their sons with what psychologists might call an 'associative fringe.' We are handicapped by assorted memories. We cannot estimate our sons exactly as their wives estimate them. They came upon us at a different stage.

Similarly, I cannot avoid taking a bird's-eye view of my children-in-law. To me, each of them was in the first place only one in a series of possibilities. I scanned them critically as they came along, just as I had scanned others before them in the same light. I had no way of

knowing that they were to be the one and only inevitable choice. Then, when they were suddenly jumped to the position of members of the family, I saw them in a new light, reflected from the love of my children. The affection that I gave them then was cordial and real, not affection *ex officio* at all. But the relation, like all true ones, remains complex. I remember so clearly all the early stages of the game, and exactly how they impressed the family when the children were falling in love.

With this historical background of special knowledge, how shall we manage to dismiss an abiding sense of responsibility when our children are starting homes of their own? We cannot resign from being their parents or get an honorable discharge. One young mother of my acquaintance did try to resign from her position of authority over her five-year-old son one day in last summer's vacation. In sudden exasperation she announced, 'Roger Macdonald, I wash my hands of *you*. Do exactly as you please.' Fifteen minutes later, she glanced out through

the window of their summer cottage to see the neighbors running anxiously along the beach, all looking at something in the ocean. And there, far out in the forbidden channel beyond the big dock, floated the blissful head of young Roger, supported with water wings. Churning along on his outbound voyage, he looked like a sea-going cherub's head with wings. The life-saving crew down the beach was rushing out a boat to catch him before he struck the swifter current just beyond.

Some outbreak in this general manner an experienced mother fears if she relaxes her vigilance. Things *have* happened so many times, things that it would be impossible beforehand to invent. We look enviously at our husbands and try to emulate their large oblivion to detail. But detail has been our province these thirty-odd years of family life. Time was when attention to detail was an effort to us. I recall one lovely April afternoon many years ago when it seemed to me that one more childish question to answer would drive me wild. One more torn little

muddy stocking to change, one more stiffened little shoestring to tie, and the taut thread of my sanity would snap. At this point, Margaret, aged seven, tried to give Geoffrey, aged two, a drink of water from the garden hose turned on full force. I rushed to the rescue and changed Geoffrey's things; whereupon, six minutes later, Margaret soaked him with the hose again in the same way. 'It wasn't my fault, Mother,' explained Margaret virtuously, as I flew about assembling a second outfit of dry clothes. 'Geoffrey didn't drink quite fast enough.'

This training in infinite detail and eternal repetition that our children gave us when we were young and they were small is not easily unlearned. Under their unflagging zeal we became proficient. Our attention to detail became automatic. It is automatic still. When an expert mother tries to withdraw her attention from the minor details of her grown children's lives, she feels as a trained woodsman or scout might feel if he tried to go through an unexplored forest without noticing

anything, deliberately oblivious to every significant aspect and object by which formerly he used to blaze the trails. No longer an official guide, if in spite of himself he sees all the signs of a great hurricane coming up, shall he not warn the gay young explorers in their canoe above the rapids that he snuffs a storm?

This is the vital problem for conscientious mothers, who wish ardently to avoid the rôle of carping mother-in-law. Shall we or shall we not withhold our warnings and advice for fear of seeming officious? We hate to nag. Yet what if a word from us might save the day? 'When *I* give advice,' said one emphatic mother of lively sons, 'I don't mean that the boys and their wives have to *follow* it. I only want them to have had that *opportunity*.'

Even before my children were married, I was never certain when I ought to favor them with my advice and when I ought to let them learn by experience. Years ago, the girls came home one afternoon all aglow with inspiration about a welfare scheme for the benefit of a Children's

Hospital. A drive was in progress, and Barbara was chairman of the Junior Board. They were discussing plans that I knew would involve floods of circulars and address-cards and record-slips, which would soon spread into every corner of the house. Therefore, in a lull in the conversation, I said, 'Now, Barbara, first you ought to get a box.' My suggestion did not seem to make a very palpable hit, and I, therefore, at twenty-minute intervals, repeated my practical bit of advice. The girls never forgot it. The remark became a byword, and even to-day if I venture a suggestion that they consider too obvious, they have only to murmur 'Get a box,' and I am supposed to subside at once. The trouble is, when I have an inspiration that I think will be useful to them, I never can tell beforehand whether I am going to be thanked and blessed for saving the situation, or whether I am going to be told to get a box. After all this training from my own daughters, is it to be wondered at that I go softly with my in-laws?

This sounds as if my children were

disrespectful. I suppose sometimes they were. Geoffrey coined a useful word to describe his sensation when he felt both impetuous and impertinent. The word was 'impertuous.' The 'impertuousness' of the modern young person is explained partly by the up-to-date briskness of modern parents, and partly by modern costume. Give me a frail lace cap, and a mull kerchief, and a soft trailing gown, and mitts, together with an appearance of decrepitude, and nobody would ever tell me to get a box, no matter what I might choose to say.

Our generation is too energetic to inspire the old-time reverent formalities so properly adopted by the young to the aged a hundred years ago. We have the experience of our years without the panoply of age. This fact was impressed upon me recently, when one of my busiest friends took her tiniest grandchild to the Church Kindergarten one day, and stayed to visit while the young instructor taught the lesson on 'Helpfulness.' In the lesson leaflet was a picture of an exceedingly old

lady sitting in a window, while a little girl threaded a needle for her. The verses beneath the picture began:

> Grandmother's eyes are old and dim.
> Grandmother's steps are slow.

The young Kindergartner, looking up and catching the appreciative glance of the visiting grandmother upon her, remarked hastily, '*This*, boys and girls, is the picture of a *great*-grandmother.'

Still, in spite of the fact that we have discarded the picturesque uniform of old age, it is true that frequently the mothers even of our generation are actually requested for advice. The more we keep our ideas to ourselves, the oftener we find our opinions solicited. Intellectual mystery is a famous lure. So is our reputation for versatility and originality in thinking up expedients.

I do not know how it is with others, but with me, when my advice has been formally requested and I have given my opinion as wisely as I can, there comes a temptation to carry on a follow-up cam-

paign. My interest is all agog. I shall feel partly to blame if the plans fail. I have been accustomed for such a long time to pushing on the reins for some of my children and acting as a balance wheel for others, that I am prompted to take the lead.

Yet I am convinced that this is the point where we may most easily run afoul of our children-in-law. We soon learn that all prodding and badgering and advice urgently given to our own children is promptly handed along to their married partners: if Romeo had lived to marry Juliet, he would presently have been quoting to her the infallible opinions of Mother Montague. It is human nature for the most independent sons and daughters to quote as authority certain parental sayings which the parents themselves, at the time, had reason to think went in at one ear and out at the other.

This leads us very close to the chief foundation of the old mother-in-law slander. Very few mothers-in-law go directly to their sons-in-law and offer to

manage their affairs for them. The dealings are largely indirect. The mother-in-law problem is essentially the problem of the mother of grown children; the procedure is only complicated a little by the fact that another personality, allied but not related, is now involved. Our advice, when we give it, seems all the more official because it comes at one remove.

Even our supposed ideas are sometimes quoted to our new relatives-by-marriage with great effect. Years ago, Endicott and I were having a vivid discussion at our breakfast-table one morning. We were talking freely, for the children were too little to understand. The debate was at its height, when I remarked with finality, 'Anyway, I don't believe that my mother would think much of the idea.' Endicott, halted in the full swing of his argument, paused respectfully to consider this trump card; whereupon young Geoffrey, eating cereal, glanced across at Barbara in her high chair and observed instructively, 'Now Ma's beated Pa.'

Mothers-in-law, in spite of the funny

papers, do hold a subtle power. Our problem is where to draw the line. I have not found a ready-made solution of the problem, but there is one paragraph in literature that I pin beside my mirror and look at now and then. It is the passage from 'The Cloister and the Hearth' describing Catherine's visit to her daughter-in-law. I know the lines by heart, but it bolsters up my good resolutions to see them in black and white:

'A Catherine is not an unmixed good in a strange house. The governing power is strong in her. It knows no discrimination. It sets everything to rights, and everybody. Now, many things are the better for being set to rights, but everything is not. Everything is the one thing that won't stand being set to rights. . . . Catherine altered the position of every chair and table in Margaret's house, and perhaps for the better. But she must go farther and upset the live furniture.'

In justice to the ultra-executive mother-in-law, we remember that later in the story Catherine saves the life of Gerard's

baby by her prompt and determined (and unwelcome) advice. This is what we are cut out for, we mothers of grown sons. We are competent for the emergency measure, for the times of whirlwinds and conflagrations and the noise of water-spouts. We struggle to keep our executive ability in check until it is needed, but a force so tremendous is likely to get in a little practice every day, just as a professional fireman slides down the brass pole in the engine-house even when there is no fire.

Shortly after my son Geoffrey was married, I invited the whole family to come home for the holidays. The gay house party was at its height, when it occurred to Geoffrey that this would be a capital time for me to hunt up all his old textbooks and notes and reference works, so that he might send them by express to his new home. Spurred on by his tactful reminders, I rummaged through all the bookshelves and storage nooks around the house and attic in the intervals of festivity that week. Finally Geoffrey and I convened in his room to pack the col-

lection in a large wooden box that I had found. As usual, Geoffrey and I held definite and divergent views about how the packing should be done. My views were obviously superior, based, as I reminded him, on extensive experience largely antedating his birth. Besides, I had hunted up the books. Besides, it was my box. On equal terms the battle raged. Geoffrey forgot that I was his reverend dear mother. I forgot that Geoffrey was a householder, a husband, and a member of the American Society of Mechanical Engineers, technically qualified to pack a box. To me, he was acting very much like my impertuous young son in his worst mood well known of old. Meanwhile, Geoffrey's graceful young wife sat attentively near us on the window-seat, preserving that admirable silence that is so becoming to daughters-in-law. Phineas sat beside her, ready with marking-pens and ink. They wisely gave Geoffrey and me a clear field. At last my exasperation with my unruly son rose to a pitch. 'Oh, Geoffrey!' I exclaimed with fervor. 'If

you children were *all* at home *all* the time, I'd just have to give up the struggle.'

Geoffrey stepped to the doorway and shouted to his sisters, 'Oh, girls, Mother says that if we were all at home all the time, she'd give up the struggle.'

With cheers and war-whoops and rounds of applause, the rest of the family, including my husband, came trooping up the stairs. Seldom has an innocent remark of mine created such a stir.

'I can imagine a good many things,' mused Geoffrey when the appreciation had quieted down a little, 'but I can't imagine Mother giving up the struggle.'

No, I shall not give it up. The end in view is well worth my effort, and I hope that I am becoming adjusted to the new focus of my life. I am trying to fit my mental vision with a pair of spiritual bifocals, as it were, that I may observe all things in their right proportions, both great and small. I have received noble compliments from my children on my marvelous self-control. And Phineas once

told Margaret that there ought to be a special way of spelling the term 'mother-in-law' when applied to pleasant ones like me — perhaps with a capital 'L' on the 'law,' or better still, he said, with the Greek lambda. He said I was a lambda. One cherishes such compliments as these, and I am growing more accustomed to my bi-focals every day.

But sometimes, in the middle of a winter night, I half wake up and dreamily realize that the wind is whistling around the house, and that the prophesied cold snap is coming on. Still dazed with sleep, I feel my conscience prodding me to get up and put extra blankets over the sleeping children in the adjoining rooms. I struggle out of my drowsiness and start to rise — and then I remember that no children are asleep there now. I need not stir. In a way it is a relief not to have to get up. I settle down and try to go to sleep again, and then I start to think. Perhaps Priscilla is prowling around on her far-away sleeping-porch, seeing that little John is snug and warm. I wonder if

Geoffrey remembered to get the weather-strips for the dressing-room on the north side of the house. I wonder if Margaret ever found the fur that she lost. I wonder if Barbara remembered to write to Phineas that she found his keys behind her typewriter-stand. I wonder if Geoffrey will take that long business-trip to the West, and if Priscilla will stay alone with little John.

At this point my less personal self asks scripturally, 'What is that to thee?'

Oh, well, of course it is everything to me. One may as well face the facts. Common sense teaches me to fill my days with new projects, letting my children live their own lives. This is exactly what I do. I have built up an entirely new scheme of existence, filled with useful activities quite aside from my interest in my children. I am not a flickering old lady living in the past. I am a busy busy person hurrying to and fro in the earth and going up and down upon it, and I have any number of irons in the fire. But activity, however necessary and absorbing, has no

bearing whatever upon the primitive preoccupations of the soul.

That is why our problem is never solved. That is why our situation is not a comedy and not a tragedy, but a paradox. That is why the most discreet mother-in-law is never quite sure whether her children-in-law consider her too influential in their family life or not. I should really like to know what they think of me, those high-spirited lovers of my children, after the ups and downs of these important opening years. Is Phineas as happy as he seems when he stops over at our house on one of his New England trips, and I let him have his Sunday morning breakfast very late at the little table by the fireplace, as I used to on his visits with us the year when he and Margaret were engaged? Are he and Priscilla as contented as they seem when the whole family comes home for reunion, and we go on our traditional picnic to the spot which the children used to call 'Fascination Point'? Of course one can never be absolutely sure. But certainly I have devoted a good

deal of attention to winning their confidence and esteem. Persons so important to my children are important also to me.

And so, I think, on the evening of Mother-in-Law's Day, I shall be inclined to count over my beautiful snapdragons rather quizzically, as a young girl counts the petals of a daisy-flower: 'They love me — they love me not — they love me.' But I have seen too many daisy petals counted in my day to depend very much on signs, except on those unmistakable human signs of affection and understanding which lead me to believe that the true answer (in spite of the mother-in-law tradition, and in spite of what a snapdragon might accidentally say) is probably this: 'They love me.'

'IS THERE ANY MAIL?'

IF you would know how much the human race perennially wants to get a letter, be its postman when you can. You need not be officially appointed by the civil service, nor yet officiously appointed by yourself. For in the normal course of events in a busy life, if you are light of foot and lucky, the chance will naturally come.

Casting back over a varied career as informal letter-carrier myself, I recall most vividly two of my favorite routes. One was urban, one was rural, and it would be hard to tell which of these parishes was more eager for its mail.

My urban route led over the staircases of a beetling apartment building in one of the tallest and most overstuffed cities in the world — this in the days before elevators were in such common use as now. I lived that year within the summit of the highest crag, and at the postman's early morning bell, down along the zigzag

stairways I would spin. And as I went, doors would open along those high impersonal halls, and faces would look out, and pleasant voices would call after me the magic words of the unofficial postman's license to perform: 'If you are going down anyway, will you please bring mine?'

Eugene Field, it is said, used to get acquainted with his city neighbors by dropping into their flats without notice and requesting a bit of pie. My method, I must admit, was less convivial, but it was pleasant in its way. It was well worth the trouble of peeling out the letters from behind those tight-fitting metal mail-box doors, purely for the pleasure of seeing, on my way back, the expressions of that highly conventionalized population come to life. Anticipating a letter, the human soul peeps out.

Once and forever I learned, that year, that it is not sheer bulk of correspondence, but The Particular Letter, that we want. There was, for instance, a certain beautiful dowager-duchess type of lady

who counted that week lost when there was no letter from her son. Not that I ever scrutinized the envelopes in my charge, but as time went on I could not help learning to recognize the penmanship of that young man. And if the eighth day went by with handfuls of letters for this lady, yet not one addressed in the unmistakable square-cut fist, I felt at fault. On a grander scale, but similarly, I suppose the Angel Gabriel feels regretful when somewhere on his cosmic rounds he finds that he has among his messages no answer to a prayer.

At least, I never got over the feeling of triumph when I saw that I had fetched the one and only letter to my clients, nor the sensation that I should really have done something about it when I did not. If there was nothing for one of my patrons except a paltry advertising card, I felt apologetic when I doled it out, remembering James Barrie's famous postman of the glen, 'whose bitter topic was the unreasonableness of humanity, which treated him graciously when he had a

letter for it, but scowled at him when he had none, "aye implying that I hae a letter, but keep it back."'

My favorite rural route was on an island far out in the Bay of Fundy, where the wee postoffice flew the flag of the British, and all the stamps bore the image of good King George. The mail-boat arrived three times in the week, and, at the proper interval after 'she blew,' every fisherman's house on the island had its courier at 'North Head,' waiting for the letters to be put out. My sister and I, by virtue of our pleasure in walking, were the delegates from the tiny seaside inn. The boat usually came in toward twilight, and we would hurry down and take our places in the waiting-line, which, like the rush-queue at the Boston Symphony, would stretch far out of the box-office door and go curving down along the road.

When our turn at the window came at last, one of us would seize the letters, the other the accumulated newspapers of three days, and we would go posting back, past the boat-landing, past the Cus-

toms 'Us, past the long-stemmed wharves perched spindling up fantastically far above the water at Fundy's lowest tide. We never loitered to sort the mail in the half-darkness, for we knew our friends were perishing. Up along the narrow road between fishermen's gardens filled with sweetpeas and monk's-hood and shadowy poppies we would sprint, until we reached the little inn on the ledge near the harbor light. And there our friends would rush from all directions to greet us, by virtue of the cargo that we had. We always gave it to our leading lady, or to the leading man, to sort it out under the lamp, and they would toss it rapidly into piles, like bridge-fiends dealing cards. We were a civilized group — no snatching, no pouncing — but with our souls popping out of our eyes we stood intent. Two or three days of famine between mails whets the appetite. I think that with us that summer it mattered less what particular letters we got on any particular day. We still had our preferences, but we were starving. Anything, anything, made out

of ink and paper with an actual flapped envelope to it was plenty good enough for us.

Probably at the opposite pole from this extreme there is such a thing as being spoiled by too much and too frequent mail. The man of affairs who has to answer a bushel of it three times a day may conceivably lose the thrill; but even he draws a distinction between his inside pocket and his files.

In a certain public-spirited household where each member has quantities of miscellaneous mail, it is the custom for the tribe to flock from all quarters at the postman's ring. The one who first reaches the door assorts the letters, and as he hands them around the others ask him quaintly, '*Was* there anything?' to which he perhaps replies morosely, still parceling it out in bulk, 'No, not a thing.' To a guest, this sounds like sarcasm, or like a reflection on the value of individual friends. But, to the initiated, it simply means that on this particular morning there happens to be no letter from the member of the

family who is away from home. And when that looked-for family letter does come, the rest of the mail remains unsorted, every one perches to listen on the stairs; if any one is still wandering about the house at large the rest shout to him, 'There *was* something!' — and to the entire avid congregation the letter is read aloud. If a far-away member of that clan wishes to write anything in confidence to his mother, he encloses it under the flap of the envelope in a little secret note. He knows that an actual letter from him coming into the house of an early morning and not to be shared with all would be too much of a tax on the curiosity of his kin. For until his letter arrives, the family will consider that there has been positively 'nothing' in the mail.

Some such emphasis upon home-letters is characteristic of every united house. When my brother Geoffrey, at the age of nine, was spending a few weeks at a summer camp for boys, he wrote a letter to our mother which she has held up to us ever since as a model of correspondence

for absent sons and daughters who are too busy to write long letters home. Geoffrey, in those days, was at the height of the caveman stage, and he felt that his parents would be relieved if in any way he rose above the average in things genteel. His letter ran:

DEAR MOTHER,

It is a pleasant day. I am all rite. I hope you are all rite.

Tell papa I do not eat with my knife.

I would like you to send me some more cash, if you are not busted yourself.

With love

G.

Within this modest compass, our mother pointed out, three virtues of a filial letter are achieved. In the first place, in order to mail it, the writer must have been at least alive 'at even date'; he had not been poisoned by camp-cooking, or pinned under a capsized canoe. If he could write the letter at all, he must be feeling pretty much 'all rite.' In the second place, it was gratifying to learn that in resisting

complete collapse into the savage state he was making every effort to keep up the family pride. And in the third place, there was remarkable insight in that proviso which Geoffrey thoughtfully appended to his appeal for funds.

In the years that have passed since the arrival of that missive, our mother has often had occasion to assure us that we need not wait until we have time to write a long letter, or what we consider a 'good' letter, before sending some message home. This business of putting off the act of writing until one has time to do the matter justice is the cause of prolonged lapses and temporary blockade. A good letter waiting to be written puts an effectual embargo on casual notes that might otherwise go forward without delay; and the longer the long letter waits, the more the material for it multiplies, until the human reason staggers in contemplation of the task. Over and over, our mother has explained to us that the veriest scrap torn from a memorandum pad arriving *on time* is worlds better than the painstak-

ing work of art which arrives ten days late.

She impressed this upon Geoffrey so strongly in his student days that, when hard pressed for time, he would drop into the post-office, buy several post-cards, and write his home-letter upon them, going smoothly from one card to the next without a break. The only flaw in this arrangement was the little circumstance that very often the cards, though mailed all at once, would be delivered at different times. Sometimes the middle of his letter would arrive first, a card without beginning and without end, which, like all good serials, would break off in the midst of its most interesting part, the conclusion of which would arrive by some later post.

Our parents were so glad of any word of any kind that they did not mind waiting over a mail or two to patch the letter up. But our sister Barbara disapproved the method, and planned revenge. She bought two post-cards of her own, and started a letter to Geoffrey, in which she reported some remarks that several girls had made

to her about him in his absence. She carefully timed her material so as to reach the end of the first card just as she mentioned the name of the only girl whose opinion of him would disturb him much: 'Then this noon,' the first card concluded, 'I saw Priscilla on the street, and she —' Here ended the card. Obviously the sentence would be continued on the next. Barbara posted the first installment at once, retaining card number two for mailing on the following day. She estimated that this would give our brother at least twenty-four good hours to watch for the postman and to worry about what Priscilla might have said. Finally Barbara posted the second card, the top line of which went on, 'did not happen to see me, as I was going into the bank and she was just taking a car.'

If our mother had known about this plan in time, Barbara's post-cards would never have been sent, for she could not have allowed us to disarrange Geoffrey's writing habits in any way. She had been at too great pains to teach him that any

word from him was welcome—no method too patchy or informal, no detail too trivial, no generality too flat to afford unfailing interest to relatives left at home.

Knowing my mother's ideas on this subject, and knowing how well I liked to hear minor details myself, I used to fill my letters home with all those odds and ends of fact that go to make up what psychologists not too admiringly name 'total recall.' Geoffrey, to whom my letters were always forwarded, used to be immensely tickled by the style of document that the family considered 'one of Margaret's best.' On one occasion he resolved to emulate the manner, and wrote a masterpiece which he sent home on condition that it should not be forwarded to me. His effort was dated at the campus library, and it began, 'When we came down to breakfast this morning, we found a rasher of bacon neatly served on a crockery plate, a knife, fork, and spoon at each cover, coffee served in a white cup with saucer to match, with or without sugar and top-milk. After breakfast I

walked with Spider Babcock up to the Hill, along Cosine Avenue, and arrived at my class in descriptive geometry, wearing my dark blue serge with the hair-line stripe, my navy-blue tie with the black sprig, and my gray socks with the neat darn in the center of the foot.'

The letter went on to tell just what Spider Babcock said in class to Piggy Robbins, and what Piggy then replied, and how they all prospered in the subsequent appointments of the day, all as nearly as possible in my own conscientious vein. He expected a storm of derision from the family, and he got it from Barbara, who replied at once in kind. But our mother assured him that of all his letters this was the one that gave her the most animated notion of his academic day.

As a family scatters and grows older, it becomes more and more difficult to decide which letters shall be forwarded to the other members away from home. Sometimes in the most confidential clan one may wish to write a letter that will

not bear circulation among all the brothers and sisters and all of the in-laws. Geoffrey and Priscilla, after their marriage, hit upon a simple device. If a letter of theirs was to be shown to the whole family connection, they marked it, 'P.R.S.V.P.' This, Geoffrey explained, meant, 'Pass 'round, s'il vous plaît.' Documents of a more incriminating or special nature were marked '*Don't* P.R.S.V.P!' with now and then a dado of skulls and crossbones to make the meaning clear. Some such device as this should be adopted by great men, to indicate which of their letters should and which should not be printed in their 'Lives.' If only Jane Welsh Carlyle had marked her most neuralgic letters 'Don't P.R.S.V.P.,' Froude might possibly have stayed his hand.

With the branching off of new families, there arises another question. How fully shall one share with the parent-stock the news of untoward happenings and anxious times? There is a canny shrewdness in the old saying, 'What you don't know

won't hurt you.' This adage may apply to invalids and to those who are subject to hysteria or heart-failure; but for sound persons of lively imaginations and broad experience there is more truth in the reverse. Whatever they definitely know won't hurt them; it is uncertainty that kills. With their wits and their philosophy they have learned to cope with all tangible affairs. They cannot be stampeded by the actual. The thing that turns them gray before their time is the suspicion that they are being kept in the dark, considerately given only a partial knowledge of a situation, while letters become more and more non-committal and infrequent, lest the facts should 'worry the family at home.' An unexplained interval between letters of this kind is the eternal camping-ground for lawless fears. No actual emergency, no matter what a cataclysm, can compare with the conjuring powers of the experienced imagination not fully kept informed.

Shakespeare has given us many a model letter, but not one, I should say, more

thorough-going than that letter of disaster in 'The Merchant of Venice,' wherein the facts are so adequately set forth:

'Sweet Bassanio,' writes Antonio, 'my ships have all miscarried, my creditors grow cruel, my estate is very low, my bond to the Jew is forfeit . . . it is impossible I should live.' Receiving a letter that begins like this, at least you know the worst. Your mind is stirred up, to be sure, but you are not mystified. It is to some purpose that you can think. You may cut short your wedding-feast, empty out your coffers, instruct your servants, consult Bellario, and get you to the ferry which trades to Venice, with imagin'd speed. All this you may do for Antonio if you wish. But you need not shrivel your good nerve cells with wild and worried conjectures as to just how Antonio's business stands. You know.

And if the expert imagination is kept within bounds by complete and limiting facts in all calamitous affairs, it is proportionately stimulated by even the briefest items of good luck and happy cir-

cumstance. In the years when Geoffrey and Priscilla went to distant parts and made their home far from every one in the two tribes, Priscilla managed to spare time from her busy days to send bulletins about their little son. The items were scarcely more than a sentence long, but they were definite, especially in the days when he was very young. For instance, there was this kind of item about the first exquisite dawning of a baby's conscious mind: 'He discovered his own hand this morning, and lay turning it to gaze at in the sun.' Not a long or labored letter, but a heavenly gift for a daughter-in-law to send to her mother-in-law, whose active imagination would instantly recreate in a flash all the sweetness of the moment — sunlight, first glimpses, attentive motherhood, the miracle of all sensitive eternal things — from that one delicate wisp of fact reconstructing the total charming scene.

But though short letters can be so adequate and such a source of fellowship and cheer, they are hard to write when we

get to owing them. After a certain time has elapsed, we feel that nothing short of an Epistle to the Colossians will do. How shall we explain ourselves, we who have no explanation, and how shall we pick up the threads?

In my possession I cherish a sample of the grand manner in this line, the most disarming apology in the world for a protracted gap in correspondence. It was written by a white-haired fragile lady of the graceful old-time school, and she opened her letter with these words: 'I know, my dear, how well you understand these inevitable, and inexcusable, delays.'

The inevitable, and the inexcusable! How perfectly most letter-writers understand them, because they are the sins that most copiously we commit. Oh, those letters that we wish we had written (and a few we wish we hadn't) — omissions and commissions the very hint of which can make the actual heart go down in its socket with a thud! If only some wonderland, through-the-looking-glass King could stand under the Queen's rose-trees

and mutter to us as to Alice and the gardeners, 'You are all pardoned!' — how our circulations would pick up. And how we worship that friend who, forgiving all our iniquities, writes to us out of turn whenever he feels like it, as if nothing had gone amiss, thus breaking up the jam in our mental logging-stream!

Rupert Brooke was an expert at this, taking up an irregular correspondence without recapitulation, but with a swiftly managed impression that he is still remembering old times and gasping for details. For example, when homesick in Germany:

'I finish this tourist's effusion at 2 o' the morning, sitting up in bed, with my army blanket round me. My feet, infinitely disconnected, and southward, inform me that to-night it is freezing again. . . .

'Oh, I sometimes make a picture of Conduit Head, with Jacques in a corner, and Gwen on other cushions, and Justin on his back, and Ka on a footstool, and

Francis smoking, and Frances in the chair to the right (facing the fire) . . . It stands out against the marble of the Luitpold Café and then fades. . . . But say it's true!

'Even with an enormous stomach and a beard and in Munich. — Yours, RUPERT.'

Once and for all, such a note creates, both coming and going, the beloved human scene. One of the most winning moments in the letters of Ambassador Page is the passage where he assures his wife that he can hardly live through the seven and a half days that must elapse before he meets her in London — if it were seven and three quarters, he would have to hurry off right away and leave everything, and take a train.

Once upon a time, far out on a rugged New England coastline, a group of us went down to 'letter-box corner' to see if we had any mail. All the small mail-boxes were clustered there, surmounting their stout poles at different heights and angles, like

mushrooms on their stems. From a long distance away we could tell if there were letters, for each post-box was equipped with a brilliant red tin flag, which was set upright by the postman whenever he left letters in the box. On this particular evening our luck was running well, and all the little crimson flags were stuck aloft, like an uprising of the Reds. We fished out our letters and sat down at once to read them on a rocky slope beside the road. As we finished, we were joined by the Oldest Inhabitant of these regions, a hale and successful real-estate expert of eighty-three, who had watched all the summer cottagers move in, and had sold most of them their land. He drew some long business letters out of his box, and as he sat down on a boulder not far from us he said, not plaintively but in the tone of one who mentions a matter-of-fact idea, 'I envy you your letters from your families. I can never get a letter from any one of my relatives again. I have to go to a medium for that.'

'Do any very satisfactory messages

ever come to you in that way?' some one asked.

'No,' said he regretfully, 'not what I should call very satisfactory. I suppose I am not mediumistic enough myself for that. But,' he added thoughtfully, 'I am sitting for development.'

Sitting for development, at eighty-three — we meditated on this for a moment as we watched the slender horn of the new moon dip down beyond the bayberry pastures in the west. 'I used to be a great skeptic about such things,' mused the old gentleman at last, folding his business documents away, 'and I still am, to a certain degree. But when all of your family and all of your friends of your own age have gone, you don't *know* how you get to wishing for just a word.'

No, probably we do not know, but we can quite sufficiently imagine, we whose relatives and friends are still going briskly hither and thither somewhere upon the planet Earth. Quick, Ariel, the ink-bottle! We have just time to get a short note written and into the evening mail!

WHEN SYRUP SPINS A THREAD

(In Praise of Cooking)

'BOIL,' says the cook-book, 'until the syrup spins a thread three inches long.'

Syrup will spin a thread longer than that if you wait, not a sticky-looking stringy thread such as it spins at first, but one of fairy cobweb fineness, spanning the whole distance between the boiling liquid and your upraised spoon, and floating a little outward, blown about in the warm air. No doubt the witch who made the clear-candy windows in the sugar-plum house of the fairy-tale could have caused syrup to spin a thread that you might measure by the ell.

The cook-books are full of this unexpected witchery of phrase and substance. 'Take,' demands another rule, 'three quarters of a cupful of sea-moss.' Sea-moss, of late the free rider of the surf, now to be measured by the cupful, for blanc-mange!

All sorts of poetic-sounding ingredients the most prosaic cook-book bids you 'take' — perhaps a bay-leaf, or a gherkin, a sprig of thyme, a stick of cinnamon, a blade of mace, allspice berries, kumquats, truffles; the cook-book is quite next door to 'The Eve of Saint Agnes' or 'Alice in Wonderland,' to read.

Sometime, I intend to lay in a supply of all sorts of samples of such literary groceries, and go skipping about in all the cook-books day by day, cooking anything I come to, undeterred by lack of any unlikely ingredient, such as tarragon, angelica, or a peppercorn.

The thread-spinning done by syrup, indeed the whole savory jargon of cook-book diction, will always typify for me the delicate charm of concocting pleasant foods. Whether experimenting with a lordly foreign dish, or mixing up the simple stand-by of every day, the born cook finds an abiding satisfaction in the perfect climax, that eager moment when the magic ingredients, blended with heat, time, attention, intuition, and a light

hand, have emerged at last a finished, delicious thing to eat! Especially is it a satisfaction when every item of a menu-group comes to that point on schedule, texture delicate, color right, flavor to gratify Oscar the Chef, all precisely timed. That moment, like the *stretto* in the fugue, is thrilling, but not placid.

'A good cook,' observed an eminent Frenchman, 'is not necessarily a good woman with an even temper. Some allowance should be made for the artistic temperament.'

Oui! thrice *oui* to that! As the most conceited cook on earth I speak. Invade not our precincts when the steak is being taken off the broiler, the mashed potatoes fluffed to a marvel, the mushrooms plump and excellently browned with butter in their sauté-pan, the salad curled and crisped on ice. If summoned expressly, you may come, but not to chat.

'If anything makes me crazy,' exclaimed a gentle kitchenetteer of my acquaintance, 'it is to have two men come out and lean up against the wall and talk

to me when I'm just ready to serve a meal.'

'I know!' said I with fervor. 'That's one thing I simply cannot bear. It drives me wild.'

'But,' remonstrated my friend's husband, looking at me in pleading protest with his kind gray eyes, more than the average eyes considerate and courteous in their glance, 'it's always so *in*teresting to talk to a woman when she's wild!'

If you feel that way about it, then is your time.

A scientist once spoke in my hearing of the 'moment of momentum' and the 'moment of inertia.' He should not have let fall those choice words in my presence if he did not want me to take them and twist them to suit my turn. To me, though I know better, the 'moment of momentum' means the moment just before placing the viands on the board; and the 'moment of inertia' is a certain moment, nearly an hour later, when Theodore Haviland and Josiah Wedgwood and Wear-Ever aluminum imperatively call.

We will not speak of the moment of inertia; not even in a whisper will we speak of that. There are, as Mr. Guppy used to say, chords in the human heart. But of the moment of momentum we will speak. It is like the moment at the opening of the Wild West Show most dear to the heart of Buffalo Bill. Those who have seen Colonel Cody entering in the lead of his cowboys will remember that momentum: Buffalo Bill, white hair flying, riding gallantly, followed full tilt by his whole show, cowboys, bronchos, mustangs, Indians, Calliope, and pony express. Sweeping around the field, the Colonel would shoot crystal balls to flinders high up in the air, his great horse all the while galloping at full speed. This was Buffalo Bill's peak of pride, this precisely punctual entrance of his hurly-burly show. Unscrupulous sharpers knew his weakness for beginning exactly on the dot. They knew that if they could buttonhole the Colonel two minutes before opening time he would sign anything, buy anything, deed away anything, *anything* to get rid

of the interruption to his mood. His lawyer had to station a bodyguard, just before the show.

That is the way a brisk cook feels when her viands are ready to file in. And if her audience suddenly deserts her at this point, and flees to post a letter or wash its hands, she is full wroth. The audience can never understand this. 'To what end raving?' inquire her clients. 'We know the supper is delicious. If things cool a bit, it will be our own fault, will it not? Why does she *care?*' But she cares, she cares. With special zeal she has brought her forces together, perfectly conditioned and coördinated, at a sort of culinary crossroads. And she likes her family to remain present at that rendezvous.

Thus, also, with regard to guests. 'Henri!' cried an old French general when distinguished guests were late. (I translate freely.) 'Henri! The first courses are routed, stampeded, demolished! Do what you *can* to rally the entrées!' Whether in France or the Yukon, where food cools or burns still more quickly, the pru-

dent visitor does well to arrive at the moment set.

To act as cook and hostess for guests, both at the same time, is the final test of the versatility of the soul. Think from how much a real cook (using the word as the English butler speaks it, *Cooook*) is excused. Cook need only say to the butler, 'The wittles is up.' Then she can imperturbably watch the fowl, or the weal-and-hammer pie for the servants' kitchen, while the grand folk sit affably above-stairs at their soup. But it takes a pretty knack to assemble the ambrosia and the nectar of an evening meal, and then come in, emulating the spirit of the Elephant's Child, 'a little warm but not at all excited,' and lead the guests to the dining-room, and preside, stirring the conversation, now gently, now briskly, with a skillful spoon, and spicing it to taste. Yet many a modern home-maker is attaining to this prestidigitating skill, in view of the size of the endowment fund required to sustain a 'plain cook' and a maid.

This may be rather trying to the high-

bred hostess, gently reared, and she may be tempted to bundle the whole matter off to a dinner at the Club; but if she conquers her circumstances adroitly, the effort is worth her while. If she is resourceful, she finds with joy that here is an art that is never 'misunderstood.' She need not wait for posterity to acclaim her gifts after she is dead. Her laurels are contemporary. Her kinsmen salute her. Her celebrity is here and now. Especially is this true if her family is pleasingly voluble and explicit in its speech.

We who cook read with distress that Benjamin Franklin's father never allowed any member of his family to comment on any article of food at any meal. We cannot help wondering about the quality of the cooking of Mother Franklin; or, assuming her an expert, whether she liked this stringent rule. For cooks eternally do thrive on praise. If nobody commended our wares, our craft would be an empty ritual. Our best masterpieces vanish so quickly that no sign save cherished compliments remains to cheer us on. Be-

sides, Monsieur X. Marcel Boulestin, that epicure, says this: 'Do not be afraid to talk about food. Food which is worth eating is worth discussing. And there is the occult power of words which somehow will develop its qualities.'

The occult power of words! Words of judicious praise do make us vain, but they also make us better cooks. We batten on renown, especially among our dearest kin. You need not flatter us promiscuously, on the cup of orange-juice in crushed ice, for instance, equally with our coffee-making. But there are specialties for each of us on which we are pleased to have our praises sung.

For instance: A certain charming mother of grown sons is famous for her 'filled cookies,' a toothsome confection which few can make so well. The cooky looks like anybody's cooky on the outside, but it is all heavenly with a dreamlike *confiture* when you arrive within. The maker of them was visiting, one vacation, at the summer place of her eldest son, a banker of considerable prestige. For this son's

small boys, she decided to make some of her old-time filled cookies, and she did so, and set them away for a surprise in the spacious cooky-jar. As it happened, the banker and two of his cronies, a lawyer and a clergyman, were going fishing before sunrise the next morning, and convened at the banker's house to put their traps into his car. And those three responsible citizens stole those famous cookies, stole them all. How could mere children, they reasoned, appreciate the filling of those celestial tarts? They would only swallow them without contemplation, plying sand shovels with the other hand. And so the fishermen took them for their lunch. Only ponder it: a lawyer, a clergyman, and a banker; the first knew the Law, the second knew the Gospel, and the third one knew the combination of that safe — and so made off with those filled cookies under cover of the gray concealing dawn. But the gentle cook promptly made another batch for the younger set, and accepted the bold theft as a fitting tribute to her fame.

My own grandmother is noted for her buns; not ordinary buns, those bread-like squat affairs with a burnt currant or two on top, but super-buns, light, light, tall, tall, raised to a feathery maximum. They are snowy inside, with tops of fragrant biscuit-color, and four large raisins to them, one on top, one near the bottom, and two others enticingly dispersed between. These raisins are not little modern ready-to-wear raisins, but great cluster-raisins, each one seeded accurately by hand. Whenever my grandmother, in our young days, had been making buns, she would telephone to our house, and say this only: 'Ask Geoffrey if he loves his grandmother.' This was code, for buns. And Geoffrey would thereupon whiz out of the yard and up the street on his bicycle right away. Our father did not chance to know about this code, and one time answered the telephone when our grandmother called up.

'Of *course* Geoffrey loves his grandmother!' exclaimed my father. 'I don't need to ask.'

'Well, ask him anyway,' persisted Grandmother. 'He'll know what it means.'

'I shan't ask him any such foolish question,' protested our father. 'What does it mean?'

'Endicott!' firmly remarked our father's mother-in-law. 'Never mind what it means. You ask Geoffrey if he loves his grandmother, and tell me what he says.'

Later, our father, still fuming, asked the question.

'Oh!' yodeled Geoffrey. 'BUNS!'

It is pretty well mixed up with love, this cooking craft. The world pokes fun at men for their susceptibility, and for the homely pathway to their hearts, but the subject comes rather near to elemental things. Observes Dr. Johnson, 'A man seldom thinks of anything with more earnestness than of his dinner.' That is to me the most lovable picture of the great lexicographer that we have — just before dinner, thinking with earnestness. It is to that state of mind that we simply love to cater, not altogether to curry favor, but

to meet that appreciative, appropriate mood. I think few cooks would cook *in vacuo;* not one cook in a hundred will bother to cook much for herself when she is alone. Few cooks are even gourmets. When a rule says 'season to taste,' they season to the known taste of their client, not especially to their own. That is why we must call cooking a craft, not accurately an art. An art, one would pursue without the least hope of an audience, would one not? I am not sure. I only know that the able cook is vastly stimulated by all rumors of her fame.

And that fame of ours is solid, unshakable through our lifetimes. It just escapes dying with us. Through oral tradition in a tribe, the repute of it lives on, for a little while at least, a pleasant memory, somewhat wistfully considered, like the gentle fame of a Minor Poet. I have now some rules for clam chowder and for the choice accessories of a proper clam-bake, for which my great-great-grandmother out of Rhode Island was justly famed.

Indeed, if you go back far enough, you find 'receets' (I am so glad that Mrs. Thomas Bailey Aldrich correctly says 'receipts') that have a romantic glamour. Go to the cookery books of early England, and learn how to make a Pulpatoon of Pigeons, and how to pot a Swan, and what should be the faire ingredients of Flummery Caudle, King William's Posset, pickled Broom-Buds, Orange-Flower Water, and a Conserve of Rosemary and Sage.

Or, if you want real antiquity, look up the rules of ancient Chinese cooks. One may there learn how to make Hard Immortal Food, and Soft Immortal Food; convenient things, one would imagine, to have in the house. Hard Immortal food contains, among many other things, 'East Melons.' Read how to make a dish containing twenty pairs of duck-feet with bamboo shoots, mushrooms, and water-chestnuts. Investigate the possibilities of Lotus Nuts, Shark Fins, Lily-Root Pudding, Fungus, Bean Sticks, Birds' Nests, Winkle Chop Suey, and Why Shon Pigeon.

If your taste is rather for things early American, then seek out the famous Salem Cook-Book, 'The Compleat Cook's Guide,' wherein one finds choice rules from 1683, Orangado Pye, Pottage, and Hedg Hogg Pudding, 'temper'd well in a pewter difh.' One cannot resist pirating a part of the rule, 'To make a Chicken Pye.'

'After you have Truft your chickens, then raife your Cruft of the beft Pafte, lay them in a Coffin clofe together with their bodies full of butter, then lay upon and underneath them, Currans, great Raifins, Pruans, Cinnamon, Sugar, Whole Mace and Sugar, Whole Mace and Salt. Then cover all with good ftore of butter and fo bake it. Then pour into it white-wine, rofe-water, fugar, cinnamon, and vinegar mixt together, with Yolks of two or three Eggs, beaten amongft it, and fo ferve it.'

That is the Amen and the Selah of all good rules for cookery: 'and fo ferve.' We could emblazon a coat of arms, with a mixing-spoon couchant, a rolling-pin ram-

pant, and an egg-whisk passant on an apron checkie; and underneath all the motto: 'fo ferve.'

It has its ancient literature and its traditions and its fitting ceremonies, our good craft; and rightfully considered it awakes a thoughtful mood.

I do not mean by this that cooking calls for an elaborate intellectual turn. Look at the darkey mammies down South, measuring molasses by so many 'glups.' Every one who ever poured molasses from a jug will know what constitutes a glup. No, cookery may not always be dependent on colossal brains. But it does call forth certain reactions that do the vivacious mentality no harm. I am not sure just how to put the reactions into words: a pure essence of gloating, for one thing, perhaps. You come out well with an angel-cake, and you stand and worship its lovely macaroon-like crust — not crust either; what shall you name its finish? Exterior angel-flake? Anyhow, you gloat. You also invent, sometimes, and circumvent, and train your talents all upon some

delicate maneuver of the craft. You are instigated, wide awake. The mere act of baking properly quickens the circulation and greatly restores the mood. You cannot cook well and remain lackadaisical for long at the same time. The mere contact with refractory substance arouses a kind of healthy vigor, what the old-time Scotchmen called 'sconce.'

There you stand, all your faculties at a focus, your glance intent, your judgment in demand. It behooves you to pay attention and to keep the fire right, using your implement like a magician's wand. You are absorbed, vigilant, watching for the peak of the process, the pitch of perfection, the accurate single instant of felicity, Very Moment of Very Moment, when the omelet is precisely right for folding, the pudding sauce exactly right for pouring, or when syrup is just about to spin a thread!

BROMPTON AND ADELIA

NOT long ago, a far-away relative made us a present of a beautiful little bronze table-bell with which to call our maid.

The only trouble is we never have a maid.

'Never mind,' said Phineas. 'Let's keep the bell on the table anyway, and whenever I want anything, you can ring.'

'What will happen next?' I asked with interest.

'Oh,' said Phineas, 'I shall ask your permission to speak to Adelia, our maid.'

'And what will she then do?' I persisted.

'That,' said Phineas wisely, 'will depend on how you train her.'

A busy life for Adelia began that day. For an imaginary person, she accomplished a good deal.

For example: dinner would be well under way, our conversation blossoming in the glow of the candle-light. Phineas,

recounting his adventures, would pause suddenly and say, 'Would you mind just touching the bell for Adelia?'

It seemed that Adelia always came to the door directly behind my chair. This made it natural for Phineas to do the talking, but he was most correct about asking leave of me before he spoke.

'Oh, Adelia,' he would begin, glancing up kindly as she appeared, 'won't you bring in some more of this exceptionally good cranberry sauce?'

Whereupon, I would get up, and, impersonating Adelia, go out and replenish the dish.

It seemed more polite, Phineas explained, to ring for Adelia than to ask me to go and fetch things, point-blank. I could see how this might be true, and I really began to like our sweet-spirited maid Adelia quite well.

Then, one freezing night soon after the great blizzard, Phineas came home very hungry, very cold. I flew to give an extra stir to the creamed chicken before I met him at the door.

'Starved?' said I, with the hopeful tone of the cook who knows she has her client's favorite banquet ready to serve.

'Starved,' agreed Phineas. 'You might let Adelia put the dinner on almost any time now.'

'She will,' I assured him. 'She told me you'd be nearly dead with cold.'

'Adelia is certainly a treasure,' observed Phineas, later, when supper was progressing well. To relieve Adelia from too much running back and forth, I had put the covered grill of creamed chicken near Phineas's plate, so that he might conveniently help himself from time to time. This, from time to time, he ably did. But presently he asked me to ring.

I rang. I fervently hoped that he was not going to send out for more chicken, because, if he did, Adelia was going to have to raid a roost. Quite promptly, she was answering the bell.

'Adelia,' said Phineas pleasantly, 'if Brompton is right there, please ask him to step out and get the evening paper and the latest number of "Scribner's Magazine."'

I laughed, for the existence of Brompton was a new idea to me; but the well-trained Adelia made no murmur of objection or surprise. As our dinner conversation went on, I was vaguely aware of what a luxury it would be if we really did employ a man who could be sent out for these very things. There was an article in that issue of 'Scribner's' that we had both been planning to read, and to-night would be the perfect time. Persons who kept butlers, I admitted to myself, did have some advantages over persons who did not.

All at once, in the midst of his narrative, Phineas paused and pricked up his ears.

'Can that be Brompton back already?' he exclaimed, and went to the front door. There, on the mat in the entry, lay the evening paper and the latest number of 'Scribner's Magazine.' I felt as if I were taking part in a play by Barrie or Maeterlinck. It was a full moment before it dawned on me that of course Phineas had planted them there himself.

Since that time, we have employed

Brompton for distasteful masculine duties, and Adelia for the more homely feminine tasks. Instead of asking Phineas to mail a letter for me, I ask him to have Brompton drop it in. And if this errand is forgotten, it is Brompton who forgets, and Brompton's pocket in which the letter is subsequently found. He accepts not only all burdens, but all blame.

Brompton, for instance, had to take the responsibility for getting our small nephew's hair cut one unlucky day. I regret to state that the family code-name for this nephew is (when remarks are to be made about him in his presence) 'the anthropoid.' One summer's day at the beach, Phineas rashly disclosed the fact that he was planning to visit the barber that afternoon.

'Take the anthropoid with you,' begged Veronica, 'and let the barber give him a trim.'

'Oh, Sister!' groaned Phineas. 'Anything but that!'

'He's used to it,' urged Veronica. 'He won't bother you in any way.'

'I know that,' said Phineas, 'but this shop isn't to be trusted to cut a cherub's hair.'

'Oh, they can't possibly make a mistake,' protested Veronica. 'There's only one way to cut his hair. Just a little-boy hair-cut, that's all. Please take him.'

'No!' said Phineas with brotherly emphasis. 'There are a hundred ways of cutting a boy's hair, and I'm not going to take any risks.'

Veronica gazed at Phineas with a sisterly eye.

'Well, then,' she conceded, 'if you won't take him yourself, will you let Brompton take him?'

'If you'll come along,' said Phineas. 'Not unless.'

'I would,' said Veronica, 'but the Maxwells are coming for tea. I can't leave. Brompton will do it for me, I know.' Veronica can be very appealing.

'What shall I tell Brompton to tell the barber?' asked Phineas.

'To use his judgment.' Veronica beamed.

'And you won't hold Brompton responsible?' went on Phineas.

'Oh, Phineas!' exclaimed Veronica. 'Of course I won't. Do go along and get back in time for tea.'

Thus Phineas, very down-hearted, accompanied by his adoring nephew in high spirits, set forth. We watched them drive off, and the warm sunlight made golden play in the little boy's wavy hair. Sir Joshua Reynolds would have kidnaped him if necessary, to get him as a model, posing with his little dog, for a companion picture to the 'Little Girl with Rabbit.' An entirely beautiful and radiant child he was as he drove away.

Tea was passing pleasantly when they returned. Veronica gave one gasp when she set eyes on her son. The barber, given a free hand and told to 'use his judgment' about a little-boy hair-cut, had consulted the taste of the little boy himself. And the Reynolds cherub, who had spied and envied some country boys with their summer-like shaven pates, had ordered one of the same. In he pranced to

the tea-party, with a heavenly smile and not a spear of hair. Veronica is a thoroughbred. With hardly a quaver in her voice, she introduced her son.

But that evening, after the little Roundhead was put to sleep with a scarf draped skull-cap fashion to protect his crown, Veronica turned to Phineas.

'How did it happen?' inquired Veronica in gentle tones.

'Brompton asked me to tell you that the damage was done before he could see what was happening,' apologized Phineas. 'Brompton had heard somewhere that there was only one way of cutting a little boy's hair.'

'But I should have *thought* —' began Veronica, and stopped. Her sense of justice was stronger even than her stricken artistic pride.

'I *told* Brompton,' said Phineas, 'that it was as much as his position was worth to take the child. But I heard Adelia tell him that she thought he ought to oblige a lady in such a simple little thing.'

'Well, I will say,' remarked Veronica

dryly, 'that your Brompton and Adelia are a great convenience to you, first and last!'

Veronica is right. They really are. Even if we should ever have a staff of other servants, we could never get along without these two. We do not overwork them, or resort to them except in times of especial need. But in moments of embarrassment or drudgery, they serve us well. There are tasks that I prefer to do in the spirit of a maidservant, not required to think too profoundly over the toil, but mainly to get over the ground.

Adelia is useful, in moments of impatience with detail. She is far more than an impersonation, just as Brompton is more than a stage-butler. Together Brompton and Adelia are working out for us a kind of shadowy philosophy of homely tasks.

The plain fact is, the Nordics will eternally miss their slaves. We need them, if we want to go scot free from unbecoming toil. No human being can live, outside Samoa, without causing some-

body a goodly bit of disagreeable work. I have no patience with the smug doctrine that all work can be agreeable if you make it so. A great deal of it eternally is not.

Therefore, in a truly just and equitable Utopia, every individual should do some plain slave labor with his own fair hands, and he should not subdue the souls of others to perform his rightful share of drudgery for him.

Who can tell at what moment such an Utopia may arrive? Therefore, Phineas and I are making the most of our admirable Brompton and Adelia, while we can.

SHE FLOATS

THE ambition to float while resting flat on the back in the sea is an intensely human aspiration. Swimming dogs, cats, horses, crocodiles, and otters never do it that side up, and not even frogs till after death. To dream of taking so daring an attitude in the water calls for a royal certitude of one's social position in the cosmic scale. It is more audacious by far than swimming, because when you swim you are in charge of affairs, and you control your destination.

But, in floating, there you lie, defenseless, your back sublimely turned to a treacherous depth of ocean under you. You have renounced volition and self-direction. The waves, without your knowing it, may turn you end for end. You have approached very closely to the inanimate. Between you and a strand of drifting kelp there is not very much to choose. It is a curious surrender of personality as you lie staring naïvely at the

clouds. You have deliberately reduced your presence in space to the minimum. Except in your own consciousness and in the memories of your friends, you have all but ceased to trouble the earth.

My own ambition to do this astounding thing would have died long ago if it had not been for the maritime ambitions that my friends felt for me. Each summer, they made it their first business to work me up to the proper pitch; whereupon they would take me out, bestow me on the waves, and sink me. I think that very few expert swimmers can imagine how much the apprentice hates to sink. My masters used to recite over me that familiar text from the Canticles of Ananias: 'You can't sink.' Oh, execrable fallacy! You can, you can!

'But,' said Phineas to me, 'you wouldn't sink if you were really *in* the water. You try to stay on top.'

This is true. I always did try to stay on top; but how Phineas or anybody else could say that I succeeded, or that I had not been really in the water! Why, I have

gone down like William Beebe to sit among the tittlebats in the bottom of the sea. Also, out of doglike devotion to my managers, I have learned to float under water, every wisp of me submerged. It is immeasurably easier to go completely under, face down, with your eyes wide open under water where you can keep track of things, than it is to float, as the French say, in *plein air*. But there is a limit to the time you can hold your breath under water, and the moment I came up to breathe I sank. You cannot say that you have learned to float, my instructors told me, until you can do it and go on breathing the breath of life at the same time.

Therefore, this summer, they resolved once for all that I should learn. I was to float; not in my favorite Dead Man manner, with my eyes bent downward at the itinerant crabs and starfish amongst whom I sojourned far below; but proper, open-air floating, gazing upward at the gulls.

To all experts who at this point remark that I should have learned to swim first,

I need only reply that my husband Phineas, my brother Geoffrey, and also my brothers-in-law had this summer decided to grant me a reprieve from that. A change, they said, is as good as a rest. In this they erred, but I was past the point of argument.

It is a pleasant moment, at a summer house-party, when all the family connection convenes upon the sand. During those first few lazy moments of sun on the beach, when every one is basking and nobody splashing in, I take my natural place as an easy colleague in the friendly group. I can sift sand through my fingers with the best. When the first few adventurers dive glibly from the spring-board and go crawling off toward Australia, I try not to notice. I build sand-cities in company with the smallest nephew, and I bake sand-pail loaves of brown-bread for the smallest niece. But this simple paradise cannot last. Sooner or later, some expert pounces on me, and leads me in.

Sinking, as all good sinkers know, is a

spontaneous act. You do not pause to reason out your moves. Spontaneously, whenever my trainers let go of me, I sank. Bubbles rose.

'Phineas,' said I, peering wetly at him with a fishy eye, 'did you see me sink?'

'You were trying to stay on top,' said Phineas. 'I didn't say you wouldn't sink if you were thrown into the water from above the water. When you hoist up the back of your neck and try to get yourself up into the air to float, of course you sink. When you raise yourself out of the water, you give yourself a velocity to go down. But if you were down without any velocity, you'd come up.'

I moaned.

'Oh, Phineas,' said I, 'when *you* float, you stick your head right up out of the water, neck and all. It looks like a prow-ornament on one of those Viking ships.'

'It doesn't at all!' protested Phineas. 'If you see me stick my head up, the chances are that I am wiggling my foot under water, or making palm-leaf mo-

tions with my hands. You can do various little things to prolong the interval of instability when you know how.'

The interval of instability! It sounded like a dangerous interval to me. I waded out.

'I'll have iodine poisoning if I swallow any more salt water to-day,' said I, 'but to-morrow I'll try just one more time.'

'To-morrow,' agreed Phineas, 'you will float with the top of your head well under water, and nothing out except your nose and chin.'

Instantly I made a mental picture of this pose, and the truth dawned on me. Of course I had been told again and again not to raise my head up. But now I saw that to have the top of my head pointing down, I must bend my neck, in the first place, before I did anything else, quite sharply back. Why had nobody thought to tell me that I must crook back my neck *before*, not after, I sank?

That night I drew little anatomical sketches, and made plans.

Next morning at swimming hour, I

surrounded my head with a fillet of rolled chamois-skin, forming a dike around my hair and ears. Over this, I put on one of those professional gray rubber helmets, fastening under the chin. And over all, by way of art for art's sake, I wore a pretty gay-colored bathing-cap, worthless for protection, but an addition to the view. With my head packed firmly thus, I could neither hear nor think, but I did not have to worry about my ears.

'*Now!*' roared Phineas through my sound-proof casque, as he disposed me on the waves.

With the grimness of desperation I bent my head completely backward, like one of these goose-necked adjustable electric student-lamps, and gave myself up body and soul to the elements, cranium down. And the fastidious ocean accepted me on those terms. The top of my head pointed to China, the tip of my chin to the sky. Astonished, I felt the soft spring of the restless water holding me. For appreciable moments I floated, wordless, deliberately poking the crown of my head into

the pillow of the sea — light, light, yet not to be dented but just so deeply down. In my surprise and admiration of this springiness of a liquid surface, I raised my head to remark on it to Phineas, and promptly sank.

But I had done it. One brother-in-law, one neighbor, one Collie dog, and one husband had witnessed me.

'Now!' said they all (all except the Collie) — 'all you need now is practice. You have the right idea.'

And so, such as it is, to all my beloved fellow-plummets, I pass the idea along. Hitherto I had been aspiring to float like a pond-lily or a peanut shell. You cannot do that unless you are a natural water-duck, at once light and plump, plump in an insubstantial, billowy way. If you are thin, you can be no pond-lily. Try it, and down you go. Those experts who thrust up their heads and crane about like inquiring sea-serpents are misleading. You cannot hope to copy them while you learn. The ears must be sacrificed, the scalp, the throat, the jowls, the all — all except the

necessary nose, and that to a wave at times without ensuing fits.

Back with the neck, then, up with the chin. Never buckle in the center, never try to talk. Keep half-a-lungful of breath in stock within you all the time, never mind a wave in the face, and don't borrow trouble about how you are eventually going to regain your feet. You can cross that bridge when you come to it, or go under; but, for now, with applauding witnesses to praise you, you are afloat. In the opinion of your trainers, you have learned, and they are satisfied. Hereafter you will hardly be able to attract their attention when you want them to watch how well you float.

This escape from the limelight is sufficient guerdon for all your toil. It is something to be able to spend the rest of your life in peace. But do not for a moment suppose that, with your new ability to stay up, you can no more go down! If you should ever care to taste the lowest depths of the ocean once again, simply double like a jack-knife in the center, or carelessly

lift a knee, or flop a little to escape a breaker, or choke a little to eschew a wave. Let no optimistic human waterfowl beguile you into believing that you cannot sink.

You can.

A STUDY IN BLACK LACQUER AND RUST

A FORD,' said Phineas, 'will run whenever a quorum of its parts is present.'

Phineas was not joking. We were chugging dubiously up the most perpendicular slope of a sequestered ridge in the Allegheny Mountains when he spoke, having sojourned thither via Cape Cod, New London, Perth Amboy, Gettysburg, Caledonia, Seven Stars, and Gap; so that just what constituted a quorum was important to decide.

Our vehicle suddenly decided for us. With its blunt nose in the air at the steepest grade over the Old Well in the Wall, it stopped going forward and began to go backward, sliding remorselessly downhill in spite of all clutches, all brakes. Not rapidly backward, but still backward, if I make myself clear.

Phineas was diligently working all devices for retarding this form of motion.

He appeared to me to have three hands and four feet. It was not the sort of a road in which one readily takes to the ditch.

'Do you think you could get out, *carefully*,' directed Phineas, 'and find a big stone?'

Out I slid, reversing the position for leaving a moving trolley-car, and sped to the rocky precipice near by. Two good slabs of granite suitable for flagging-stones I seized, and ran nimbly to the aid of my ever-more-rapidly-receding spouse. As I ran, my brain repeated that cheerful motto, 'It gets you there; it gets you back.' Just now, for the moment, it was getting us back.

Dashing well to the rear of the down-coming machine, I placed my stones, as boys arrange pins on the track of a loco-motive, and hopped aside. The slim wheels of our frail Juggernaut felt of the stones, jounced a little, threatened un-easily to mount over them, and lodged.

'Good enough,' said Phineas. 'We'll let the engine cool.'

Whilst it cooled, he sat within our phaeton, holding tightly all the brakes. I removed my suitcase from the back seat and perched upon it in the road.

'When you start,' said I firmly, as Phineas held the door open at last for me to get in, 'I shall follow on foot, bringing this baggage and a stone.'

Phineas protested, but, pinned as he was to the emergency brake, he was in no position to coerce. I took up my traveling-bag and my running position in the rear, and waited for the starter's gun. A few false beginnings, a few lingering deaths of the engine, and we began to climb, at a snail's pace at first, then with un-snail-like coughs and jerks, and then more steadily so that I had to quicken my gait a trifle to keep up.

I had adjured Phineas not to stop for me, but to husband any spare momentum for the final spurt. The grade was now so steep that it tilted the vehicle unnaturally on end, and made me, in my capacity as trailer, puff. Through the window in the rear curtain I could just see the dogmatic

set of Phineas's ears, as he drove rigidly on, and uncontrollably I began to laugh. Trotting ardently along behind our own conveyance, with my luggage in one hand and a rock in the other, I made a fetching picture for the tourists coasting down. One more tall hump to climb, one last precarious moment when the flivver seemed to stand on its hind wheels like a bear, and we reached the crest, and saw most of Pennsylvania spread out below us, with all its products neatly marked in, like an agricultural map.

I do not tell this story in disparagement of our Car. The least criticism would seem to me disloyal to the vows I plighted on my wedding-day. For the sturdy Ford was already getting on in years when I married into it. Hither and yon it had conveyed its master Phineas in the blithe excursions of his bachelor days, a jaunty distance of nearly twice around the world. One can understand, therefore, that it was, by the time I met it, a confirmed bachelor Ford. From the first, I refrained from comment, allowing car and

master to work out their route together as of yore, while I held fluttering square yards of road-map against the wind, and preserved the high impersonal behavior of a guest. This absolved me from responsibility, and from broils.

Once or twice, to be sure, I have been known to ask a leading question, as for instance when of an early Sunday morning we were skimming through the city of Washington, down past the Naval Observatory along Massachusetts Avenue. We were going at a spanking clip around Dupont Circle, when suddenly out from behind us came bowling a detached automobile wheel, running briskly along by itself, about to pass us on the left.

'Some poor duck,' mentioned Phineas, 'has lost a wheel.' Our own car at this moment was sagging in the back.

'You don't suppose,' I ventured, gazing back over my shoulder at our listing rear, 'that it is ours?'

At this, our left-hand hindmost brake-drum settled gently down. Without further parley, Phineas leaped out and ran

after his own rear wheel, looking as he flew like a vivacious advertising poster of 'Time to Re-Tire.' Miraculously our wheel went tooling along under its own power ahead of him, perfectly balanced, hoop-like, gravely steering a true course. Around the Circle it sped, and when it came to the corner of Connecticut Avenue, it veered neatly, turned, and started smoothly down Connecticut toward the White House, with Phineas hard after it, and was still going nicely when he laid a detaining hand on its shoulder, as it were.

When Phineas and the wheel came back again, I was discreetly busy with the jack.

One can plainly see that I esteem myself to be a model wife. I vary from the politest stranger only in that I am handy with the jacking process, know where to find tools and when to dole them out, and can take the brunt of conversations with talkative standers-by when Phineas makes repairs.

A Ford under repair in the highway makes a chatty center in a sociable world.

A dismembered Pierce-Arrow, now, is an impressive sight. To put it into trim again, professional efforts must be expended, and generous sums disbursed. This makes for the high dramatic mood. But a Ford, like all pragmatic structures, to cut any figure at all, must be continually doing well. Therefore, when a Ford is being triced up by its master, one does well to keep the talk on a light impersonal plane.

Often these roadside confabs have a local twang well worth listening to. 'Are there,' I inquired to divert the attention of a certain gaunt selectman who had come out to offer advice alongside the Lincoln Highway, when Phineas, before storming the Alleghenies, was tightening his brakes — 'Are there any bad hills ahead, between Fort Louden and Ligonier?'

'Oh, no,' rejoined the moderate Pennsylvanian, gazing out toward the craggy outlines of the ridge against the sky. 'No'm. As you go along, you'll find here a bit of a dip, and there a considerable bit

the afternoon lights on the peach-blossoms that cover the hills around a certain nameless valley that Phineas calls 'Nook Hollow,' half-way between Fox Chapel Road and Harmerville, near an unfrequented woodland lane.

Next to our instrument board, for comment, ranks our brilliant license-plate. The only way to appear remarkable in a Ford is to brandish a flamboyant license across the length and breadth of several distant States. One evening we had arrived at the tip of Cape Cod, after a trip of about a thousand miles. Near the filling-station, I saw two little boys, one true Cape-Codder, and one little Portuguese, sitting on a stranded boat. They were openly remarking us, and I stole nearer, hoping to overhear some fine salt-water idiom, rich with the vernacular of the sea.

'Good *Night!*' exclaimed young Provincetown to youthful Portugal, pointing at the outrageous purple-and-orange license-tag of our adopted State. 'That Lizzie has been going *some!*'

It really has. It bears such marks of travel that we have little fear of thieves, and need no longer reckon in 'depreciation' when we figure up its running cost. We have already depreciated practically all we shall. Another year or so, and we shall pension it, and let it spend its last of life at the family's summer home near Buzzard's Bay. There, with all the tribal mechanicians to attend it, it will have pleasant vacation jaunts from house to bathing-beach. It will feel once more the salt of clambake-seaweed in its tonneau, and we shall be in the market for another kind of car.

But when we get into our dapper little Priceler and drive away, leaving our true old steed behind us in its stall, I think it will be a long, long time before we feel just like ourselves again. We shall look more presentable, but we shall not feel more gay. And when, of an April twilight, we are loitering back from an afternoon tramp around Nook Hollow along one of our deserted woodland roads, I know that I shall absent-mindedly glance

down under our favorite parking-tree, expecting to see once more waiting for us that high old flaring top. It will not be there, any more. We shall step into our suitable motor-car and drive smoothly off, and it will run easily. Oh, how easily it will run! But on the highways of remembrance, there will be traveling still a certain homely vehicle that we shall not forget. It will jog along companionably over many an accustomed bumpy road, its thermometer set for July weather and its altimeter set for rain, behaving always competently in our memories and transacting business in parliamentary form, with a full and adequate quorum of its parts.

'THUNDERING WATER'

SIXTY years ago, my grandfather paused on a mid-winter trip to the West, and walked under Niagara Falls, when columns of heavy ice were standing all around in the grip of an old-time 'cold snap,' everywhere perpendicular glaciers, stark monuments of zero, reaching up and up. As he had nearly finished his promenade along that slippery lower ledge, a whole cliff of ice just behind him fell, roaring to smash itself on the frozen rocks. The noise was deafening, as it echoed and reverberated from those walls. It sounded as if the whole ice-curtained precipice, from the 'Point' to the Cave of the Winds, were breaking off at the top, rocks and all, and crashing down. Such enormous uproar was out of place in such great coldness. We associate dead silence with grottoes of utter cold. But here now was the tumult of zero, the thundering clamor of rigidity, an arctic uproar, a glacial riot of unearthly sound.

When my grandfather emerged into the upper world again, he drew his hand across his hair in the conventional gesture, and felt a queer sensation. Every separate hair was as if fastened into his head like a spike. It hurt to touch it, and was especially uncomfortable to try to smooth it back. Quite literally and completely, for the only time in his life, his hair had stood on end.

'Thundering water,' water-thunder; to name it that, the Red Indians must also have thought of it in terms of sound. The name, centuries old, may serve as a sort of station to steady us in the dizzy thought of how long it has been going on, that thunder of water, 'half as old as Time.'

And yet, when I first looked down at it, pouring its heaped-up river headlong downward in the summer afternoon, my first instinctive thought was that we must have happened to arrive at a moment when some extra impetus had struck it, an excess of torrent suddenly swept in from somewhere that would calm down

in a little while. I thought as one does when a cloud-burst happens in a thunder-storm: 'It will let up soon. This can't possibly last.' It was altogether too extreme to last. I felt the instantaneous impulse to make allowances — the quick withdrawal of a moderate type of mind from any concept that seems too excessive to be safe or sound.

Whereupon, I remembered that of course it would not let up. It had always been a Wonder of the World, and that was why. It eternally gives assurance that an extreme can last; that it need not be of brief duration simply because it is extreme. The cautious type of mind looks at an exceedingly great love or grief, and says sagely, 'It will subside before long. It cannot possibly last.' But, bearing in mind Niagara, can we ever again be quite so glib and sure? Niagara does not presently subside. On a transient planet, it is the best example that we have of the persistence of a maximum, the durability of an extreme.

It is also the best and most dramatic

visualization of the great word 'Down.' From the pictures, I had hardly imagined how it would look when seen suddenly, with its sheer drop, directly from above. You can hardly take a convincing photograph of that straight downward view. Try it and you fail. The thing foreshortens; even a motion-picture would fail to give that cumulative sense of underworld deepness that you get when you follow with your eye those tons of endlessly falling foam. No matter how many times you arrive there, you have again that peculiar headlong sensation as you take the first look down: it is deeper than you remembered, and more is rushing over; the glance pitches over an extra span, much as the whole body pitches forward when one unexpectedly steps down an extra stair in the dark. You may or may not be one of those who feel a dark inhuman impulse to follow that raging water into the depths; but watch any group at the very edge, and you will see some one step back prudently for an instant, and look away. The mere memory

of that sensation if you ever had it is enough to make the palms of your hands feel uncomfortable and cold.

I wonder if part of the perennial fascination of Niagara may be the fact that it falls from such simple and accessible country. Most of the greatest waterfalls, like the Bridal Veil and the Alpine cataracts, come from a mountain-side somewhere off from the habitable levels, in wild country. Your vantage-point as you watch them is normally from lower down, or from an opposite cliff, or at least from some remote point in geography not too civilized, as when you visit the Victoria Falls in the Zambezi.

But to come upon the shaggy torrent of Niagara, falling full tilt at your feet, from the dead level of the busy town and the comfortable grapevine-growing country, has all the dramatic force of incongruity that attends any tremendous cataclysm happening illogically in the midst of the calm affairs of every day.

Probably every one has wished that he might chance upon Niagara without ever

having heard of it before, unexpectedly, as some savage Huron or Iroquois Indian, scouting across to spy upon the Erie tribes or the Senecas, must have come upon it long ages ago. Since that is out of the question, one would like a chance to see it with no crowds of fellow-tourists milling around. At least, we felt that wish when we were there one time, and we stayed up to all hours of night in the hope that the other tourists one by one would fall off or drive away. But they outlived us in great numbers, still arriving freshly in their cars long after we were ready to die of sleep.

And so, next morning at sun-up, I stole out of the sleeping inn without the escort or sanction of my guide, and prowled along past the closed shops and through the park to the Point, sure of seeing the Falls at this unearthly hour alone. And behold, a semicircle of seven good early tourists already there at the rail!

Had they watched all night? Never mind. What was I that I should demand the whole of Chaos and Cosmos to myself?

There was still room for one more in the semicircle at the very edge.

I took my place in the group, and looked down, and straightway forgot that I had plotted to be alone. One always is alone, anyway, at that verge. The falls were full of lovely shadows in the slant light of early sunrise, and a morning-glory-vine part way down the rocks was opening its dainty shell-pink flowers, one spray of the blossoms so near the main rush of water that it quivered and swayed with the momentum of it, and was drenched with the splashing foam. Just as near as it possibly could reach and not be snatched into the torrent, it looked like the spirit of perishable fragility, the merest petal of wild-rose coloring swinging airily out against the majesty of the falls.

We were all looking down, half hypnotized, all silent, except for two gentlemen just in from the train, who, while gazing down, talked in a desultory way about their journey and the value of certain securities in which they seemed about to deal. They were not noisy, but I could not

help gathering that they both were interested in 'properties' and city bonds and Southern Mortgages, and that the burlier of the two men was responsible for a brokers' firm. I glanced up circumspectly past them for a glimpse of the Canadian Falls, and just then, with a shift of light from the rising sun, appeared a rainbow more purely lovely than anything I had ever seen, better even than the usual run of rainbows at Niagara.

It was not a double rainbow, but a single wide-hung arch standing out with all its exquisite colors perfectly defined against the Canadian foam; and the most beautiful thing about it was the completeness of the violet end of the bow. One rarely sees pure violet in air so perfectly. In rainbows after thunder-storms, the violet is seen against the gray of tattered clouds, and merges, toning off into the gray. And when violet shows in a driftwood fire, it is usually seen against the saffron of other flames, or against the dark. But here the violet was startling, against a dazzle of white early-morning

mist. Hold a diamond against a tall snowdrift in the full sun, and turn the diamond slowly, watching every color until you get the perfect ray of violet, unwavering, with the snow behind it, and you have nearly the hue of the end of that Niagara rainbow. Only the violet that morning had full sweep, a sheet of lovely color, the very visible thought of violet, at the foot of the rainbow against the white, finely divided spray.

It was as beautiful as anything in all eternity ever needs to be beautiful. In short, here was a rainbow that, in a lifetime, one would not care to miss.

Every one else in our group was looking down, as I had been the moment before. Should I call their attention, or keep still? If I should say to these strangers, 'There's a rainbow!' would they not think me an impressionable soul, rather affected and susceptible, what Pater used to call 'intense'? I held my peace. The burly financier beside me drew forth a long document from his pocket, opened it, glanced up, saw the miracle, and promptly whirled

to the group. 'Everybody look at that rainbow!' rumbled he. As one man they looked up at it, with a deep-drawn, involuntary group '*Oh!*'

Whenever I have thought of that electric moment since, a pretty question haunts me: which of us, that morning, at heart, took his royal position in the human group more sensitively, that man of the world, or I? At all events, I am glad that he was there to do the generous honors for Jehovah, a responsibility which I was too hesitant to assume.

The presence of men profited me well in yet another way later in the morning, when we yielded to the temptation to voyage out into the ring of the falls in the little boat. The Maid of the Mist had always bewitched me, with her strange-looking voyagers all 'black-robed, mystical,' draped in horny black rubber from head to toe. Seen from a distance and from above, those black-cowled passengers on the boat had always looked to me like something out of the 'Idylls of the King.' But seen from the inside looking

out, we found those Maid-of-the-Mist costumes more like something aquatic, gnome-like. Our fellow-passengers in their heavy rubber head-dresses and long coats were like trained seals wandering on deck, and the most fetching of all seemed the children's costumes, tiny replicas of the big ones, so that in and out among the full-sized specters went trotting little groups of quaint black baby seals.

Every one who has taken that odd voyage remembers how uncalled-for those costumes seem at first, and how thankful one is for them later, when the boat ventures into the Horseshoe, bobbing among the whirlpools, pounded on by the showers of falling spray. I did not want to meet that spray head on. It took my breath away and put my eyes out, and I crouched instinctively. But we were full in the circle of the noblest aspect of the Canadian Falls, a world of falling water, white and green. The heavy shower pelting upon us was so beautiful in the radiant sunlight that three men, one of them my husband, sprang to their feet to see it

better, eager not to miss a single *nuance* of the curious lighting in that spray. And in the excitement of the moment, they all forgot that I was there, and they grouped their stiff black rubber coats closely around and above me, forming a perfect wind-shield, so that I could gaze out unblinded, untouched by the downpour, and see everything — the Cave of the Winds, the Rock of Ages, even the distant procession of black trolls that were taking the land-trip under the American Falls. The men were unaware that they were acting as my tents and my windbreaks, but another lady, shielding her face with her hands, glanced over at me, appreciated my sudden sheltered advantages, and smiled. I felt like an Esquimo in an igloo of walrus-skins, snug, peering out, beady-eyed. Niagara is most clearly seen that way; or, better still, from the vantage-point above it, looking down.

Indeed, I was ready to admit that there are some things too great and high for me, and the full force of Niagara, seen too near, from underneath and pelting me,

is one. I think that to take it in adequately, one ought to have the full dimensioned, wide-ranging spirit of a man. Perhaps I might feel that way about any tremendous maximum, even to facing and absorbing the full force of a raging grief.

That idea seems to haunt and tease one, and return in spite of evasions, the idea of catastrophe in connection with Niagara Falls, the notion that there is a slight rumor of evil congenial to it. At least, the God who made it is no average citizen of any provincial star. One can bear to think of all the frustrations of a life-time in the presence of that Niagara deluge, as it goes with nodding plumes superbly down. There is in it none of the weakness of collapse; the river plunges over undiminished, in full pride. It has the stern severity of the Lamentoso in Tschaikowski's greatest symphony. It is the prototype of the inevitable, and of the irrevocable. It does in nature what is done in literature by that slow old haunting line of German prose: '*Es ist vorüber; es ist unwiederruflich zu Ende.*' Unwiederruf-

lich, the falling of those great waters, like so much in life; inevitable, irrevocable, not again to be called back.

It would be a pity to let one's haunting thoughts spoil Niagara; but you cannot spoil Niagara. It is one spot in the world that will bear companionship with a master grief. You may think anything that you are capable of thinking in its presence, and find your thought superbly matched in turbulence at that brink. This is not for consolation; Niagara offers no cozy element of comfort. And it is not for brooding; there is nothing morbid, not a stagnant drop of water there. But there is a kind of vigorous, hard relief in daring to look upon a thought untoned, unmodified, and see another enormous thing, equally out of proportion, shattering grandly down. Like all disaster, it goes on equally in the sunshine, with a lively holiday populace hovering all around.

But if you really wish to escape the crowds of tourists, there is a way to see Niagara by yourself alone. I am told so, at least, by a practical young mechanical

engineer, who hit upon the method for himself. Go, he said, when the weather is so extreme that nobody else cares to be abroad. A good blizzard in the dead of winter, according to him, is a fairly safe time to choose. At least, he himself once found the place deserted in such a storm, with no other human being in sight; and he stood there with his hat clamped under his arm and his hair blowing in the howling wind, and watched Niagara's whiteness whirled upon by the hurricane of snowflakes to his heart's content, exactly like an Early Man.

Some day we shall go to see it so, when the worst snowstorm of the winter is blowing down from the Great Lakes. And perhaps the white wilderness of snow in the wind will return the whole chasm, except for us, into primeval solitude again.

But until that time, I am content to remember it as most of its pilgrims see it, sunlit, supreme in beauty; visited by rainbows, and tourists, and falling leaves.

THE STROOMERS

A COINED word is seldom tolerated by anybody except the minters thereof. There are plenty of words that we have been intending to look up in the dictionary without foisting on us one word more. And therefore it was through sheer force of personality that three good scientists, one from England, one from New England, and one from California, were able to introduce the new word 'stroom,' which they had made, into the vocabularies of the busy group with whom they dwelt.

They made the word, they told us, synthetically, each man contributing two letters secretly chosen. The collection turned out to offer R, O, S, T, O, and M. They tried various combinations of these ingredients, but did not care much for the resulting 'rotmos,' 'motsor,' 'sormot,' and 'torsom.' These would go very well in 'Sohrab and Rustum,' but sounded awkward west of Suez.

'Suppose we let the two "o's" stand together,' mused the Englishman, 'and have the word *stroom?*'

'Stroom!' A good word, surely, and one of thoughtful tone. Sauntering along in a pleasant Anglo-American silence, the three men pondered the word to see what it should mean. And between the last maple-tree and the first barberry-bush along their homeward path, they formally adopted and defined it as their own.

'Stroom,' they said (and told their wives at tea), was the one and only word for that rambling, effortless, individual kind of talk that scientists and such-like thoughtful men, together with wives and such-like thoughtful women, indulge in now and then when thoroughly off guard. Strooming, they said, must not be confounded with gossip, or small-talk, or shop-talk, though it may be spiced with a dash of all of these. An adequate synonym for it has never existed up to now. 'Conversation' is too general, 'discussion' too ponderous, and 'palaver' far too smart. 'Confab' verges near it, but has

no handy verb. 'Parley' and 'conclave' are too set. The dictionary needs the word, in short.

But the great Murray-Oxford dictionary, by which the three scientists all swore, will not receive a word unless it brings its credentials with it in the form of quotations to show its usage in the tongue. And so the only member of the company whose portable typewriter was in good repair offered to compose the literary fragments in which the various forms of 'strooming' first appeared.

Since the derivation of the word was mixed, the poems were written as nearly as possible in the vernaculars of four lands, Ireland, Scotland, England, and North America. In order that the editors of dictionaries may take their choice, we insert the verses here, beginning with the folk-meter of the rare old Irish jig:

Och, Bernard and Dennis and Paddy O'Toole
Were stroomin' together with me,
When Paddy made bold to remark on a topic
On which we could niver agree.

'Go aisy,' sez I, and, 'Begorra!' sez he,
'Go aisy yersilf, me good man!'
So I hit him quite fairly a-top o' the crown,
And wid that the discussion began.

My Biddy came runnin' and put on the kettle
O'er the little small fire o' the peat.
And she fetched out the saucers and made us some tay
As fast as the water would heat.

Och, a stroomier avenin' we seldom have had,
With ivery man takin' his part,
With all of our wisdom and all of our blather,
Each talkin' with all of his heart.

So if ye would stroom in the stroomiest manner,
I'm tellin' ye this is the way:
Begin the grand talk wid a crack o' the crown,
And a dish o' the strongest of tay!

The word, perhaps, is most at home in Ireland; but it comes out quite cannily in the Scotch accent as well, when sung with a sort of Lowland crooning, not with a Highland skirl.

Oh, have ye not, full monie a time,
Just at the evenin's end,
Sat doon to rest ye by the hearth,
And stroomed wi' some auld friend?

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For stroomin' is the bonnie talk,
And wise folk like it fine.
'Tis turnin' oot the contents braw
O' your guid pow and mine.

'Tis not the gossip o' the toon,
Or topic o' the day,
But driftin' comment pondered weel,
Now wise, now daft, now gay.

When evenin' shadows fall at last
Sae restfu' round the room,
When thochts rin on in easy waves
Like winds o'er fields o' broom,
When firelight frae the inglenuik
Is flickrin' through the gloom —
Come then, auld friends, and sit wi' me,
A wee bit while — and stroom.

Both the Scotch and the Irish take the word in connection with good cheer. It is in the accent of North America that the word can be used most wistfully, as appears in the following fragment, done into English, probably, by Pocahontas. The term 'Sewickley,' to be sure, is now the name of a fashionable Pennsylvanian suburb, but nevertheless it was of old the

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Indian word for 'sweet water,' 'pleasant river.'

Hast thou heard of Stroom-Sewickley?
Hast thou heard it from the wise men?
Heard the tale of how we dwelt there,
We, the tribe of warrior-stroomers?
Long ago we pitched our wigwams
Near the hills beyond the river.
There at evening came the warriors,
Smoked their pipes and stroomed at sunset —
Stroomed of hunting and of fishing,
And of scalps that they had gathered,
Curious scalp-locks of the white man.

Thus we stroomed beside the river,
And we named our pleasant valley
'Stroom-Sewickley.' Thus we called it,
Meaning 'Stroom-by-pleasant-waters.'

This the name we named our wigwams,
For the chiefs and warriors stroomed there.

Dost thou ask us of our strooming,
How it differed from our councils,
From our pow-wows and our war-whoops,
From our songs of love and battle?
There is no one left to tell thee.
We have gone from Stroom-Sewickley.
All our sachems have departed,

All our braves and warrior-stroomers.
Not one warrior left to tell thee
Of the manner of our strooming.

But if thou wouldst know, then listen,
Listen to the pine-tree branches
Strooming in the winds of evening;
Listen to the sound of rushes
When canoes are passing through them;
Listen to the leaves of poplars
When the rain is in their branches.
And beyond the mists of twilight
Hear the ghosts of days departed
Strooming softly in the shadows.
Only these are left to tell thee
Of our talk around the camp-fires
At the doorway of our wigwams.
Only poplar trees remember,
And the rushes by the river.

These three selections are enough, perhaps, to give the spirit and tone of the word, but they do not as yet articulate a definition. We must look to the English for that, and where more hopefully than in the lines of a dramatic monologue after the manner of Robert Browning?

'*Stroom?*'— Eh? — You want a definition?
Don't know the meaning? Never heard it? Gad!

You're from the States — speak English very
rarely?
My word! But still, you read it now and then?
Not to know *stroom!* Man, Man! I tell you this,
Shakespeare went strooming up the steps o' the
Mermaid,
With Marlowe and Jonson drinking in his words;
And pirates stroomed with Drake at old South-
ampton;
Addison stroomed with Steele at coffee-houses,
Bozzy at Mrs. Thrale's. And Mrs. Gamp,
She stroomed with Betsey Prig — a kind of stroom-
ing.
But better keep the word for the sober talk
Of the wise, off duty. It's that, that kind of
talk:
Talk of the sage, not pledged to stick to wisdom;
Talk of the specialist, casual, off his guard;
Talk of the expert, musing, without authority,
The richest kind of irresponsible talk,
Copious, careless, yet withal instructive —
Topping, in short.
I'm strooming now, man!
Zooks!

The new word, then, derived, defined, and adequately equipped with a literary lineage of its own, we offer to all stroomers, incipient or confirmed. And if there is any one who is not sure whether he can

qualify for the cult or not, let him glance at a few of the random instances of strooming given here, and be reassured. For the circumstances of such conclaves may be most informal, and the company casual to extreme.

For example: A reunited family, all its sons and daughters home for the holidays, has just come in from a Little-Theater party, at which three plays, one Ibsen, one Provincetown, and one Strindberg, have been presented by the newest of Little Drama Leagues. The plays were long, the waits were many, and the clock says long past twelve. As one man, the family drifts out to the commissary department for a bedtime raid. Each with a confiscated viand, they perch about, nibbling drowsily, like a convention of somnambulists in full dress. The father, dispensing ginger ale, ventures a wary comment on the evening's ample programme of dramatic woe.

'Well,' observes one charitable soul, daintily cutting a wedge of mocha cake, 'you must admit that all the actors

seemed to be trying to do their very best. Angels could do no more.'

'No,' rejoins her brother from his post near the ice-box, 'angels could do no more. But angels might have had sense enough to do less.'

With this propitious gambit, the whole family, half asleep though it is, with one accord begins to stroom. They need not even wake up to do it. Long training in tribal custom has made the thing automatic. The strooming of a family that finds itself at last at home, alone, past midnight, after an entertainment, free to criticize, is talk in its most unshackled, primitive, and blissful form.

At least, it is the most primitive form when the company is mature and mixed. But to catch the art in its very earliest stage, one must overhear the talk of little children, at moments when they suppose themselves alone, at ease.

Two small boys were strooming in this way once, as they sat on the slope of a lawn, watching a steam-shovel at work. Between them, under careful guard, sat

the baby brother of one of the small boys; and as he sat there with the sunshine burnishing his curly auburn top-knot, that little citizen, unable to join in the talk, was laughing to himself as hard as a two-year-old baby knows how to laugh.

'Is anything the matter with him? What's he laughing at?' one of the boys at last interrupted the thoughtful colloquy to inquire.

'Oh, no,' mused the baby's brother. 'He's all right. He isn't laughing at anything. He's just enjoying hisself with laughing.'

'Perhaps,' suggested the other wise five-year-old, glancing down at the short socks on the baby's plump brown legs — 'perhaps the blades of grass are tickling his lambs.'

'Those aren't his lambs!' protested the baby's brother, hoisting up the socks as far as they would go. 'They're his calves!'

'Oh, yes,' agreed the other. 'That's what I meant. I meant his calves.'

This point settled, the two elders

stroomed gravely on, while between them the red-haired kewpie rocked with private merriment on the lawn.

It is a very rare grown-up who can intelligently join in strooming such as that. In order to discuss a steam-shovel and a baby brother conclusively, one really needs to have a jacket-pocket sagging with April marbles, and a sling-shot in one's hand.

Indeed, perhaps it is chiefly in our own especially selected groups that we can take our part in strooming, as such, with the most intelligence and charm. There are certain men and women who seem to have a perfect genius for assembling such groups; and when you find them, you are almost certain to discover that they have made their homes into an ideal setting for the art.

One such perfect place among others I remember: a long, white-pillared house just off a college campus; and on Sunday evenings certain of the girls from the college across the hedges, and certain of the men from the men's college across the

hills, together with a sprinkling of professors from each place, would proceed down the lane by starlight to that house, and present themselves without disturbing the music that was sure to be going on. Whichever guest sat nearest to the door would let the others in, and they would take their places by the fire and listen, while the hostess at her Steinway and the host at his organ interpreted together the grand range of those exquisite things for harmonium and piano — mostly Brahms and Beethoven, and Johannes Bach and César Franck. Meanwhile the kitten, Pushkin, with paws in pockets, would survey the ruddy firelight through his slanting oriental eyes; or sometimes, struck with a lively caprice of energy, would go springing like a sudden maltese grasshopper from lap to lap. And when the music was over, the strooming would begin, well-warmed and prepared for by the noble chords, and the glowing logs, and the quaint moods of the little Pushkin cat. You did not need to stroom unless you felt like it in that expressive

group, for the talk took care of itself, as all good strooming does.

Oh, well, we all know what it is: a kind of audible, unforced meditation, with the leisurely response of unhurried thoughts and after-thoughts. It is the true and final test of perfect strooming that you may at any point ask permission to go back to the last remark but one, and add your after-thought. For this reason, and for others, it is cherished by the race. The subject-matter for it can never possibly wear thin; for all new days and friends and happenings and places can renew the stuff of strooming, the warp and woof of dreams.

'Conversation,' as the salons understood it, is perhaps a vanished art, but strooming assuredly is not; for it goes on forever in all sorts of nooks and mountain fastnesses and hearthsides of the earth, wherever the amateurs and veterans of the gentle craft assemble around campfires or candles or peace-pipes or teakettles of their own.

And so, if you have ever known the

lure, and the tranquillity, and the warm coziness of such moods, you need no formal cards of membership in the good circle of congenial fellow-men who love to stroom. You do not even need an initiation or an introduction; for by virtue of inheritance, native talent, acquired characteristics, foreordination and election, you always have belonged!

SNOW ON THE BEACH

TO a visitor who has known the seashore only in summer, a patch of snow on a sand-dune looks as out of place as an icicle in a grove of cocoanut palms. Especially is this true of a beach that one has seen dotted with awnings and sunshades in the bright July vacation; for example, the tip end of that sandy old seagoing peninsula, Cape Cod.

If you should ever wish to take part, some day, in the life of the remote, unspoiled edges of Cape Cod in the dead of winter, you might do well to provide yourself beforehand with two qualifying conditions. First, leave your automobile behind you and depend instead upon a pair of water-tight, utterly reliable shoes. Second, be sure to have a good sensible reason to account for your presence there.

Otherwise, you are like a summer guest unexpectedly bouncing back when the company element is supposed to have dispersed. Arriving in mid-winter, you are

unseasonable, out of the picture. Do not suppose that you can skirmish aimlessly about, day by day, from the Pamet River to Corn Hill and around Highland Light and along the 'outside,' unnoticed and undiscussed. Book-agent you obviously are not, from your actions. If you were a mere excursionist you would not stay, at this gale-swept time of year. Rum-runner you may possibly be, but probably are not. As you go about, you are not aware that you are being looked at, but a great many well-sharpened weather-eyes are taking note of you. A city person, in February, haunting the back of the Cape, you are by all odds the most conspicuous thing in sight. To fit into the picture becomingly, you should have some sort of agenda, if only the task of seeing about some needed repairs in the summer cottage of a friend. This gives you a right to go about with a useful manner and a worried brow, strictly attentive to business of your own. And only thus do you blend tidily with the Cape Cod winter scene.

My friend's cottage needed repairing. The least I could do was to go down to keep her company and to help about the house.

The cottage was far better than a summer bungalow. It was a really old Cape house, snapped up just at the moment when an enterprising Portuguese family had been about to buy it. My friend stood high in the good graces of the neighborhood, if only because she had arrived in the nick of time to supplant the Portuguese. The true Cape-Codder is tolerant of the swarthy races, and holds no grudge when they prosper and build and have their own small-fruit gardens and Guinea boats. But there is disappointment in a neighborhood when one of the old low-roofed white houses goes over to Portugal. 'Take your head out of the kettle-closet, Ruth,' said a shrewd old skipper to a tidy housewife who was polishing the unseen floor of that retreat. 'Take your head out of the kettle-closet. The Portygee will get your house when you are through.'

So much, in fact, was said to us about our prowess in snatching the deed at the last exciting moment, that I began to wonder if the ousted Portuguese would bear us any grudge. The sky was completely overcast that first night, and when we put out our lamp, there was nothing but solid darkness left in all the world. I had never dreamed of anything so dark. Black, no less. The wide-open eye seemed to float in it, totally bereft of sight. There was a ghostly sound of flapping shutters, and the bare twigs of the waxberry and rosebushes brushing against the house. The shutters of my window had come loose and were smashing themselves to pieces in the wind, so I pulled them together and secured them firmly with their frozen hook. It was so dark that I could not even see the shutters, much less anything outside.

The perfect blackness was soothing, and, somewhat tired with furbishing up our own kettle-closets, we went at once to sleep. In about an hour's time, I suddenly awoke. And there, reflected on the

ceiling above me from under the closed blinds, was a definite patch of the faintest possible light. My heart stood still. It was a good seven hours before daybreak. No moon was due for a week. Our house was out of range of any other light. Could Portugal be crouching under our window, plotting revenge, with a faint, faint lantern light?

Stealthily reaching for my heavy coat, I stole to the window and peered out through the broken blind . . . and at that moment I knew that I had never actually seen real starlight in all my life before. The high wind had blown the clouds away, and now the drifted snow was reflecting back the light from the brilliant winter stars, enough pure starlight to cast that pale reflection up to our ceiling from the snow. Star light, star bright — with my reason I had known that the stars of course shed light, but I could not have guessed that it would be enough for this. How long is it since you were in a countryside without a single street-lamp or automobile headlight, a place so dark

that you could be aware of any appreciable illumination from the Gemini or Sirius and Orion? Such ancient light, arriving from so far, frost-colored on a bank of snow — I shivered my timbers nearly to pieces by the window admiring this rare thing.

Next morning I confessed my adventure, and learned that I had badly misjudged the Portuguese. 'Oh, no,' protested our neighbor. 'They wouldn't think of doing any harm. It's only that you don't exactly want them buying up your *house*.'

After falling properly in love with the charming old Cape houses, one can readily understand this jealous twinge. The houses are so accurately suited to an English-thinking breed; modeled after the cottages of Cornwall, planned from old English 'builders' books,' the timbers for them brought down by water from the coast of Maine, pitched overboard offshore, rafted up to the land at high-course tide, and spread out on the dunes to dry! In the days of the early building

down near the end of the Cape, it was far simpler to sail the lumber down than to cart it out over all those miles of sand. My friend's house was made of just such seafaring joists and beams. One takes a certain pleasure in knowing that most of the rafters that are more than a hundred years old on the Cape have been well-salted in the sea.

Discovering our love for the details of the old houses, our favorite neighbor took us calling with her one afternoon. I shall not soon forget those cozy rooms, with their exquisite white paneling around the fireplaces, and from their wainscoted windows distant glimpses of the sea. Several of our hostesses brought out their choicest copper-luster and Sandwich glass to show us, not with the idea of selling it, for they always had plenty of chances to do that, but to let us enjoy it, and to tell us with grave voices and hidden, hidden humor about certain overconfident antique-hunters who, in summer-time, had 'been along.'

Often when you make a call, on Cape

Cod, you are given the daintiest possible refreshments before you leave. For instance, at the house of — oh, it is so maddening not to use the real Cape names! They are not replaceable by any that can possibly be made up. To use them is a breach of manners, and to substitute anything else for them is a crime against locality and genealogy and the 'inevitable word.' One is therefore circumspect. But when one has been given a piece of delicious whipped-cream-cake by an eldest great-grand-daughter of an eldest great-grand-daughter of the Pilgrims, whose combination of given name and married name would make Oceanus Hopkins and Peregrine White look pale — it is hard that one may not say the perfect name right out, and boast. Personally, I feel as if Miss Emily Dickinson herself had given me one of her renowned cream-whips, with a poem, and yet I could not ever be allowed to tell.

On our way home from our last call, we cut across the dunes over the trackless snow, past the tidal river where the miss-

ing golf-balls of summer club-men are frequently found caught among the herring in the weirs. All this region within miles on either side of Highland Light is capital golfing country, the nearest of anything we have to the Scotch links. And so, every summer, diligent caddies scour the matted moors, among the wild cranberries and the beach-plums. And every winter there is an excellent supply of fresh golf-balls for the fish.

As we came near home, our friend invited us into her house to have a cup of coffee and get warm. Her husband was already there to greet us, reading his newspaper under the lamp. 'Yes,' said our gentle hostess cordially in response to his queries about our luck, 'we had quite a pleasant little cruise.'

There is no end to the delightful cruising that one can do on foot around Cape Cod. In the intervals when the sun comes out, the snow melts quickly, and the hosts of seagulls go winging over the harbor or alighting on the water and bobbing there like so many decoy ducks. And

when the snow-squalls come up, the gulls are an unexpected part of the shifting scene, white ghosts of seagulls against the whitened air, or sometimes sitting upright on a frozen spar with snowflakes falling around them, the motionless birds looking so erect and wise, like a row of penguins at the Arctic Pole.

All this is on the harbor side. But if you chance to be there on a day of raging storm, the Atlantic side of the Cape is the place to see. Out over the deserted ups and downs of the moor you beat your way, struggling breathless against the violent wind. It is only three miles across at this part from the harbor to the outside, but it seems three hundred as you toil against the flying sleet. With your last spurt of strength you scramble up the last high dune to an opening where the wind has bitten out a hollow between two camel-back crests of sand. And there you lie down perfectly flat, like the battened-down beach-grass that sparsely clings there, and thrusting up your head over the edge of the sand-cliff you gaze down

and out at a hundred thousand horizontal acres of Niagara Falls. Thoreau said it was like watching the storm from the deck of a ship at sea. And you have the great advantage that Cape Cod's deck, at least as yet, does not pitch and toss. It is an unforgettable phase of land and sea, in the winter's worst wild-crested moods; and one so extreme that nobody except the lighthouse-keepers and the coast-guards can be tempted to linger there over-long.

'Wasn't a ship wrecked out here last winter?' we asked a neighbor who came over to help us mend our pump.

'No,' said he pleasantly, 'it was a brig.' Whereupon he went on patching up our pump.

Every man on the Cape, by the way, is a precisian in the use of nautical terms. And every man on the Cape, also, could write a profound and melancholy essay entitled 'The Anatomy of Pumps.' Likewise, before our visit was over, so could we. The topic is one of mystic depths and great emotional range.

'When the summer crowd has gone,' a

tourist observed one July day, 'these places must be dead. How in the world do the people down here manage to live?'

The answer is, as Dr. Crothers would say, they make shift to wag along quite well. Every vestige of the vacation crowd is gone, every sand-pail, every beach-parasol, every water-wing. Even Provincetown, both up-along and down-along, is guiltless of an artist's sketching-stool. All the fair-weather boats are hauled up far above the highest rift of seaweed, each boat neatly roofed over with an upper-crust of canvas, like a humpy apple-pie. The toy wind mills are down from the gardens and fences. The ice-cream-stands and the Blue Bunny Shoppes are closed. The windows of the festive little summer cottages, Bayberry Shingles and Seldom Inn and Bonnie Dune, are boarded up. Even the mosquitoes have hauled down their Jolly Roger and furled their pirate sails. And at this point the true neighborhood life of the Cape begins.

In summer, one hardly stops to think that these neighborhoods have any sym-

metry with relation to themselves. The individuals appear to us detached. We have no way of knowing that the postmaster is well acquainted with the man who overhauls boats, or that the skipper of the Roaring Gimlet is brother-in-law to the owner of the general store, or that all these men are versatile and self-contained persons with many-sided characters not wholly vouchsafed to the casual eye. Cape Cod has been 'done' so thoroughly by fiction-writers that it shies a little from strangers and with reason guards its speech.

'If you want to know what the Cape is really like,' said one of our new acquaintances earnestly, 'don't read all the stories by authors who come down here simply to write us up. Read the book about the Cape by Shebnah Rich. He was brought up here, and he knows.'

Shebnah Rich is trustworthy, for he was not constrained to concoct a 'quaint' story, with outlandish eccentrics to cause a plot.

The winter life of the Cape, at least

the tiny glimpse we had of it, is distinctive, but not outlandish. Think what you have, if you really belong down there. A little valley between the slopes of the dunes is yours. There you are, hidden away, you and your slant-roofed hereditary house. Over one dune lives your neighbor, and over the next three dunes lives another, all the houses folded out of the worst rush of the wind between the rolls of the moor. From the road, a passer-by does not suspect your presence at all. You are sequestered, but not cut off. You have your own path, your own conch-shells on the doorstep, your own customs, your own town hall perched on the highest wave of land, where you may go to the sociable community suppers, and once a year elect your own town officers, including the School Janitor, the Fence-Viewer, and the Clam-Warden, and all the rest. In a little pine grove beyond your house you may tar your own eel-traps. You have your 'wet-garden' or your asparagus-bed near by. And in spring comes the arbutus; and a little

later, in time for early weddings, come the blossoms of the locust-trees, feathery flower-fronds as decorative as sprays of pure white wistaria, or myriads of tiny clustered sweet peas with dainty green smilax leaves. The life is busy and frugal, but not sour, and even in winter not unbeautiful or dead. There is too much to be done.

One evening toward the end of our stay, we were invited to have some music at the house of a one-time sea-captain who in his day had known Lisbon and Java Head. Before we opened the piano, the Captain's wife brought out some daguerreotypes to show us, and also some exquisite hand-weaving of bygone days, and a dish of old Sandwich glass whereon was a pattern of a man ploughing his garden in the foreground, with a square-rigged whaler in the offing, under full sail. Our hostess kindly told us the history of some of these treasures. Her husband, watching us as we lingered adoringly over each separate thing, began to worry for fear the evening would be gone without

the singing we had planned. The Captain had, by the way, a remarkably fine voice, well-placed and well-controlled, one with which he could at need either out-roar a storm or sing a lullaby. He was in a mood to use it, and as he saw us poring over each daguerreotype in turn, he felt hope vanishing. He rose uneasily and paced the quarter-deck. Then he opened the piano and flourished the music and lighted an extra lamp. We were too engrossed to take the hint. Finally he strode up to us and planted himself squarely before his wife. 'Mother,' said he imploringly, 'it looks to me as if you had brought out quite a lot of gear. Aren't we going to sing?'

We sang. And what did we sing? All the best of the old hymns, 'Dundee,' and 'Duke Street,' and 'Serenity,' and 'Were the whole realm of Nature mine,' and the Captain's favorite, 'The Lower Lights.' As he sang it, that hymn took on new thought. It was not a sentimental exhortation, but a command, in the Captain's voice. 'Let the lower lights be

burning'—I shall hear the echo of it, with that complete authority of tone, at times when wintry hurricanes are blowing up outside.

While our host was seeing us home with his lantern through a flurry of sleet that night, he told us a time-honored Cape story about a summer tourist who hailed an old resident setting eel-traps, to ask him about the tides.

'Can you tell me, my good man,' began the somewhat patronizing traveler, 'what makes the difference between the tides on the two sides of the Cape?'

'Oh, yes,' came the prompt reply. 'It's the sun, moon, and stars, and one dum thing and another.'

This was told to us as a chuckling example of adequate repartee. But ever since I have considered it a most satisfying and soothing answer for the too-inquiring turn of mind. It has finality, yet offers a certain latitude of thought. It is one of Cape Cod's most happy contributions to a rounded philosophy of life.

Confronted by an illogical universe, it presents repose. It keeps in reserve a wide, storm-tested explanation for those unreasonable matters that vex the questing soul. Cape Cod, long accustomed to discrepancies in the tides, has found for an irrational cosmos the rational clue. If ever the world should ask you what has kept your life from presenting a perfectly consistent and neatly balanced whole, you need not even stop tarring your eel-traps to explain. You may use this good Cape answer. It was the sleet on the dunes, squalls in the harbor, brigs on the reefs, sand in the wind, snow on the beach-grass: one thing and another — and the sun, moon, and stars.

THE RESPONSIBLE EYE

AN authority on social behavior once wrote a manual of good form for bachelors, and dedicated it 'To all sisters.'

As one comes upon that dedication in an otherwise technical work, one suspects that the author took this opportunity to acknowledge certain advantages accruing to his youth. Almost surely he had not been an only child. He had known what it was to have a responsible eye upon him.

There is a tonic effect and a bracing quality about the glance of the brisk, responsible eye. Great men have acknowledged the stimulus of it, in later years, with thanks. But we who habitually look out upon the world through its unshuttered lens are subject to three temptations that the irresponsible never know. We may train ourselves to resist them, but we can never be completely cured of them.

The first of these is the precept-giving tendency, a kind of 'Mentor Complex,'

its first symptom being a sharp sensation on the tip of our tongue, where resides our good advice. Mrs. Nickleby expressed this phase completely when, after offering advice unheeded, she exclaimed, 'All I say is, remember what I say now, and when I say I said so, don't say I didn't.'

The second is the mania for trying to act as Burton Holmes and Thomas Cook and Raymond-Whitcomb in the life-tours of our friends.

These two are so obvious and so celebrated that they need no elaboration here. But the third goes deeper, crops up oftener, and is more slippery to limit or define. It may be called for convenience the Administrative Urge, but it is more than that. It is a worried sense of being civilization's sole executor and trustee. It is the more insidious because, like many vices, it has a virtuous basis, when not carried to extremes. At its best, it founds institutions, fosters good works, sponsors advance. Judiciously controlled, it is stuff of statesmanship. It has within it the making of martyrs, and of martinets.

Our difficulty lies right here. When are we being leaders of thought, and when are we being marplots? How are we to tell where to draw the line? The attitude of our constituents is no clue. Nearly all inspired standard-bearers have infuriated their contemporaries at times, yet they were heralds of the light. It is no sure guide to us to be aware when we commence to irritate our friends. John Huss irritated his.

Thus our urgent sense of responsibility may rush us into epoch-making deeds, or it may whirl us headlong into blunders which a lazier character would not commit. Our friends may sometimes have reason to feel toward us as a gentleman of my acquaintance felt one day when he had bought a dozen new golf-balls at the seaside 'general store,' and had brought them home in a paper-bag. He placed them on a table when he came in, and five minutes later they had disappeared. He searched the summer cottage high and low during the whole of that golfless afternoon. Next morning, he learned that a guest at the

cottage had mistaken the paper-bag of golf-balls for eggs, and had set them away tidily in the refrigerator, on the ice. If the golf-balls had been eggs, her responsible act would have been received with more acclaim.

Our Administrative Urge has the dangerous knack of making us feel active and all-powerful, without making us all-wise.

My own most acute and typical encounter with this lifelong impulse came in early childhood, in connection with the burning of our house. Never once in all its history was our house on fire, but every so often I used to wake up with a start in the night, the whiffs of smoke pungent in my nostrils, and in my ears the unmistakable crackling of sparks. This had happened so many times before I was eight that I had learned to treat it skeptically myself. Poised quaking in the dark, I would snuff the burning fumes. A charred timber would crack remotely somewhere on the lower floor. Was it, or was it not, my duty to arouse the house? From a worldly point of view, I knew that

I had better go to sleep and let somebody else discover the fire this time. But suppose I did, and the family all burned? Had not the Lord perhaps awakened me, and through me meant to save us all alive? I was a truly religious little girl, and I knew the story of the child Samuel by heart. I was more than willing to convey any authentic messages from Heaven. But I had already done it so many times before. And I strongly suspected that my father's favorite rôle was not the rôle of Eli.

I used to wait as long as I could bear it, and finally step across the hall and break the unpleasant news in a whisper through the door. Then, wrapped in a great quilt, I would wait on the topmost stair, while my father, like a melancholy Benedictine Friar proceeding to midnight chapel, would go down, night-lamp in hand, and investigate the house. I was never reprimanded, for my parents were responsible householders too. In fact, they instructed me to waken them rather than to prowl about downstairs myself, as I did

once, hunting up the blaze. I gathered that they preferred to be routed up for fire rather than by footpads. But I cannot think that my false alarms could have added to my popularity in the home. If only once there had turned out to be a little fire!

This most primitive phase of the responsible urge bids us ward off calamity from our friends. The next is milder, and pricks us on to see that our loved ones act appropriately and punctually on time. Here is where sisters and wives excel. One husband, who forgets anniversaries and birthdays, has a wife who smooths over his deficiency by sending off punctual little gifts to his relatives, with best greetings and his love. The only trouble is that she sometimes forgets to tell him what she has done. Affairs with this couple came to a crisis when the husband actually did once remember his brother's birthday in the nick of time to send him an elegant improved flashlight for his new car. The brother met him at a convention soon after, and thanked him for the gifts.

'Gifts?' inquired the giver. 'Did the flashlight come in two?' 'No!' said the brother. 'The flashlight and the pair of gloves.' Ever since, that husband has stipulated that his wife shall notify him as promptly as possible after he has become a donor.

Another minor failing of good wives is to write, in letters of congratulation or condolence, 'My husband joins me,' and then not think to tell him what it was in which he joined. One charming social dame was not at home one afternoon when a young friend of her husband's came to say that he was leaving town, and to pay a farewell call. She promptly wrote a gracious note, saying how sorry she was to have missed his parting visit, hoping he would enjoy Chicago, and concluding, 'Roscoe joins me in the most hearty good wishes for your success in your new work.' Then, having performed both her husband's duty and her own so featly, she dismissed the matter from her mind.

Weeks later, Roscoe met the young man in Chicago.

'And what,' inquired Roscoe, 'are *you* doing *here?*'

'Why, working!' rejoined the youth.

'Working!' quoth Roscoe. 'You don't mean to tell me that you have changed your job?'

All this, of course, is only an extremely trifling manifestation of the Urge. If one cannot say, 'My husband joins me,' what if the good of being married at all? But timely notifications are in order, if one cares about preserving household calm.

A third very powerful prod to the responsible is the slogan, 'If you don't do it, who will?' Largely applied, this is a vigorous watchword. But it should choose for its field an objective very spacious and unselfish and universal — the Rem Publicam, no less. Carried down into fine-scale subdivisions in the intimate or domestic circle, it often lacks proportion. It leads us to worry more than makes for urbanity among our kith and kin.

This phase of desperate responsibility is not merely a wifely or sisterly trait. Brothers can suffer from it too. Even the

very young administrative brother can feel it strongly. True presidential timber begins early to preside. I am sure of this, because my own younger brother Geoffrey shouldered the responsibility for the souls of his sisters at the early age of seven.

This was on the occasion when our sister Barbara was about to join the Church, at what was then considered a most precocious age. Geoffrey, hearing of her purpose, was aghast at the idea. But not a word to the family did he say. Resolved to lodge his protest at headquarters, he went to the parsonage, clambered up the high steps, reached for the doorbell, and rang. He asked the maid if the minister was in, and was shown, stocking-cap in hand, to the study. His pastor made him welcome, urged him to sit down, and then, noticing his gravity, asked him if he had anything on his mind.

'Yes,' said Geoffrey. 'It's about Barbara. You didn't ought to let her into the Church. You don't know what she is. Why, Mr. Osborne,' he concluded ear-

nestly, 'Barbara isn't *fit* to join the Church.'

Mr. Osborne, who had known the family for years, surveyed his troubled parishioner respectfully, and inquired in what items Barbara fell short.

'Why, only this morning,' replied Geoffrey, 'she threw a shoe at me.'

'And what,' inquired the Reverend Mr. Osborne, 'had you already done to her?'

'I threw my toy ladder at her first,' declared Geoffrey with high honor. 'But,' he added firmly, '*I* am not asking to be let into the Church.'

At this climax of perfect logic, the broad-minded clergyman explained that people did not join the Church because they thought they were so perfect, but because they wanted to improve, and felt the need of aid in their struggles to keep straight in a difficult life. He requested Geoffrey, as a personal favor to him, to coöperate in so far as he found it feasible, in removing any obstacles that might impede the new member on her upward way.

Geoffrey, still dubious, but with a new slant on organized Christianity, gathered up his cap and mittens and came home. Not until twenty years afterward did our wise pastor tell our parents how he was waited on by Geoffrey in Barbara's behalf.

And if a younger brother can feel responsible, an older brother is proportionately worse. One gentle little maiden, the only girl in a family with five older boys, rode out quite well the gales of fraternal rule. But one afternoon, when her five brothers had been teaching her to climb trees, roaring their directions at her with all their obstreperous wills, she came in and sat down on a footstool beside her mother, and was very quiet. At last she said, with a sigh, 'Oh, Mother, I am not used to boys.'

A responsible group endeavoring to impress its will is far more potent than the single soul. This is why the Administrative Urge so often turns to clubs, to committees, and to forming what old-time business men used to call a '*Com*-bine.' Some earnest worker founds a club. Then

eligible persons are urged to join. The programme committee then urges speakers to speak. Whereupon the rest of the members are urged to come and hear them speak. The thing is a vicious circle, vicious with responsible vice. One must join the club in the first place merely to lend the good cause moral support. There will be no duties; nothing is implied. Then, once netted, as a member and a good citizen, one must in turn feel responsible not to let this fine club of which one is a vital part become defunct. Nine tenths of the organizations of the globe are being kept alive by artificial respiration supplied by busy, responsible persons who would do far better to save their breath for more essential things. All the most famous clubs of history have been small, and spontaneous, and when their time came they were let to die. Suppose Johnson's Club had been kept going to this day. How the members of it now would be prodded on to preserve the fine traditions of Sir Joshua and Oliver Goldsmith and Mr. Burke! The Club would have to

'stand for something' in the affairs of today; the least we could do would be to offer a prize for the best high-school essay on 'Boswell's *Life*.' How much more immortal is that Club because it died!

It is through responsible organizations also that we are exploiting the dreadful discovery of the Quota, and of 'Weeks.' Any group whatever has power to sit in council and affix a quota and a week upon us out of a clear sky. The central theory is that if anybody is going to do a certain thing, everybody must, to make the matter a success. It is like the Mack Sennett Comedies: let *everybody* throw a custard pie. One pie, now, justly aimed, might in a manner of speaking go to the spot. But too many blur the issue.

Real art eschews mass action and applied arithmetic. Remember in 'The Little Minister,' when Gavin, incited by the Egyptian, throws the divot at Halliwell? That one divot hit the head of Halliwell with a purely satisfying ping. But it was the rarity and precision of the act that lent it dramatic force. Neither

Gavin nor any other minister could afford to throw one twice. Neither should all ministers, all together, throw one, each. This business of campaigning everybody into doing this or that good deed for fifteen minutes every day is not only bad manners, but bad psychology and bad art. If we did them all, we should scarcely have time to drink our orange juice.

The organizers of these plans for mass-action are goaded on by their responsibility for results. Bothering people is not their personal taste, but they are doing their duty as the world expects it of them; and, by the shades of Fox's Book of Martyrs, they are going to do it well. The only crime of committees is their propensity to start something, and then, by pointing to their own painful sacrifices, to coerce the balky to comply. If you have within you the smallest drop of responsible blood, you yield to the high pressure of the 'Hundred Per Cent' watchword, and thus, by your compliance, encourage committees to commit.

The Administrative Urge is an incura-

ble and gigantic thing. The secret of standing up against it is known only to those who have been reared to full manhood in a family whose members all had it in virulent form. Our family was such an one. And we children, at a tender age, adopted an effective pair of slogans among ourselves. We never used these slogans to our elders, for good and sufficient cause. But in our own set they served us well, and a family of boy-cousins had an even better formula than ours. For the benefit of a pestered world, I shall divulge these three childhood war-cries now.

Whenever a brother or sister of our group was overstepping his administrative powers and ordering the rest about unduly, we would simply inquire, 'Who was your brunette employée last twelvemonth?' (This strange wording is explained by the fact that our parents had strictly forbidden us to say, 'Who was your nigger-waiter last year?' and a young and frolicsome uncle had supplied us with more elegant synonyms at our request.) And if the offending brother did not sub-

side, we would say, 'I dare to throw a full glass of water.' This, by the way, was no idle boast.

But our boy-cousins had a watchword that made ours look tame. Their parents, too, were particular about their speech, and so they had to disguise their threats in code. The code was intricate, but well understood among us all. When any one of them had gone too far in trying to impose his will, the intended victim would temperately remark, 'I shall chy a brick.' This, by mutual agreement, meant, 'I shall hit you in the eye with a red-hot brick.' The coined word 'chy' should be pronounced 'tchai,' to rhyme with 'eye.'

If you are one of those harassed souls, who, knowing the Administrative Urge yourself, are also the victim of it on the part of others; if you are already on twenty committees, and a friend importunes you to help out on just one more; if you are appointed an officer of a Current-Events Class that you have never joined, or elected without notice to some Rotunda Club or Senior League;

if you are implored by a distracted Programme Committee Chairman to save the day by making a speech when you know the whole audience would be better off at home; if you are urged to lay aside seven cents a day for seventeen months to buy your poor children some more shelves of Knowledge on this or that thing that they ought to know; if you are beset by all of these and have plenty of hay out yourself besides: then simply take your choice of counter-slogans, as we, hard-pressed, did often in our youth. Even to-day, in an emergency, those old war-cries echo in my mind, and some time, if pressed too far, I may come out with them.

'I dare' (I shall say when I am assigned to give a Benefit Bridge to eight ladies, and to see that each of these eight shall give yet another Benefit Bridge to still other eight, and so on, like the horseshoe nails) — 'I dare to throw a full glass of water.' And if the committee persists, I shall chy a brick.

But what of the Administrative Urge

when it bubbles up within one's own self? There is no ready formula for that. When the radiant Responsible Eye is in our own forehead, there is no patented device, no holophane or legal hood or dimmer, to mitigate its ray. The responsible instinct, once aroused by the sight of a situation in need of a managing hand, is all but impossible to repress.

In our own household, when one of the members had given way to this impulse and was running wild, full tilt, in the height of benevolent action, corralling the rest of the tribe with might and main, we used to call it, '*L'aprés-midi* of an *Exécutif*.' I wish that Debussy had written a ballet upon that theme, for the orchestration of it is the kind of thing to suit his genius well. It should begin with the filmiest of tentative searchings, hesitant, uneasy, the merest premonitions of fragmentary chords. (The oboes, I think, should take this.) Then, as the Responsible Eye comes to focus and the Responsible Heart begins to quicken its beat, the music too should rush the *tempo*, at first

with an apprehensive clipping of the measure, then with swift *abandon*, until all the instruments are building up the rapid total volume, violins all playing octaves splendidly in unison, 'cellos and violas sweeping great double chords, harp-strings *arpeggio*, percussion *sforzando*, bassoons and trumpets full blast, *agitato*, *poco à poco*, a disquieting chaos of turbulent, uncontrollable sound. The piece would call for a Mordkin or a Nijinski to dance it well, for at its height the executive thought becomes overmastering and colossal, whirling like a tornado through all the alcoves of the brain.

This true executive Urge is a primeval force. To control and direct it properly is the ultimate test of the judgment and the good taste of the soul. It is the most subtle temptation in the world for the born manager, when off duty, to manage every being who comes within convenient range. There is no getting over the life-long impulse to 'take charge.' We who are prey to this temptation may train ourselves to rule our tongues, but at the cost

of tremendous muscular strain. Said one capable mother whose grown sons were putting through a project which she considered rash, 'I try not to nag, and I try not to worry, but I can't help holding my breath and *sitting forward!*'

It is a feeling that we recognize at once, we executives, with our bright responsible eyes. And after all, would it not be rather a pity if every excellent manager should cease to give his friends and relatives the benefit of his special powers? Would not the world lose much valuable prodding and advice if all fine responsible persons kept their own counsel, and simply, in an emergency, sat forward and held their breath?

But we need not worry too responsibly over that. Not many of us will.

THE END

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